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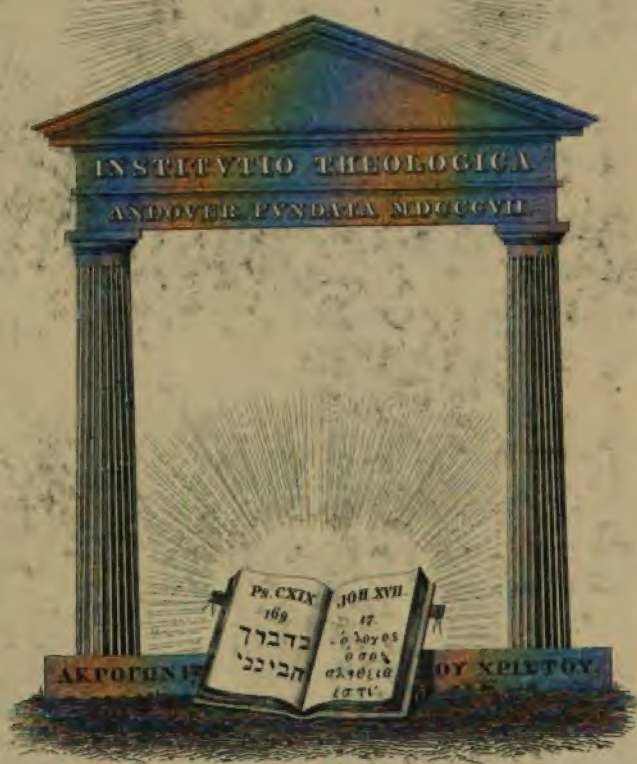
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# EXPOSITIONS

BY THE  
REV. SAMUEL COX, D.D.

*AUTHOR OF*  
"A COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF JOB," "BALAAM, AN EXPOSITION AND A  
STUDY," "SALVATOR MUNDI," ETC., ETC.

*THIRD SERIES.*

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TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
THOMAS ERSKINE OF LINLATHEN,  
WHOSE SAINTLY LIFE  
WAS  
A STANDING REBUKE OF OUR MANIFOLD IMPERFECTIONS;  
AND WHO, AS A TEACHER,  
WAS AMONG THE FIRST IN MODERN TIMES  
TO BRING IN  
A FREER GOSPEL AND A LARGER HOPE.





## PREFACE.

---

THIS Volume differs from its predecessors only in that it contains a larger number of discourses which stand in a formal, as well as a real, connection with each other.

It opens with four sermons on *The Charter of Individualism* which we owe to the prophet Ezekiel, a charter which deserves, and would repay, a far larger and freer handling than I could give it here. The popular misconception of the teaching of Moses (in such passages as Exodus xx. 5, 6 ; xxxiv. 6, 7 ; Numbers xiv. 18 : and Deuteronomy v. 9, 10) is by no means confined to the populace. Within the last few years I have heard more than one "pillar of the Church" preach sermons on it of the most admirable quality save only in this : they assumed that it was only the *sins* of the fathers which are visited on the children; and took no note of the various influences by which that fatal bequest is modified and controlled. So far as they were concerned, Moses might have said nothing of the mercy shewn "to a thousand generations" of them that love God and keep his commandments, Ezekiel might never have delivered the message, "The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father," nor the Scriptures in general

have assured us that it is only his own deeds for which God will, and does, call every man to judgment. To this day I have met with no reasoned attempt to reconcile the teaching of Moses with that of Ezekiel, or to shew either that our environment may be no less potent with us than hereditary bias, or how other and higher influences may counteract and triumph over them both. I cannot but hope, therefore, that the present endeavour to cover the whole ground, and to reconcile truths which seem in conflict, imperfect as it is, may prove suggestive, or even provoke a larger and more competent handling of the whole subject.

Any reader interested in this subject will do well to turn back to Volume II. (pp. 1-18), and read the discourse on, "The Transfer of the Religious Unit," which I intended to serve as a preface and introduction to the four on "The Charter of Individualism." The five were preached on the successive Sunday mornings of December, 1885, and I hoped they would all have appeared in the same Volume. But though the first was ready in time to stand first in Volume II., the Printers rushed the book through the press so rapidly that, by the time the subsequent four were written out, there was no room for them.

Another series will be found in Discourses ix.-xiii., in the course of which I have tried to re-construct the characters of such obscure or unknown Hebrew poets as Heman, Ethan, and Asaph, from the indications they have left on their respective Psalms, in order that my hearers and readers might feel each one of them to have

been a real and living man, with a distinctive mission, a characteristic message, from the living God.

But the longest series in the Volume is that on *The Faithful Sayings of the Primitive Church*. I have endeavoured to treat these familiar Sayings historically, and thus both to discover what it was which made them so precious to the early Church, and to prove them worthy of all acceptance by the Church of every age. I have based my exposition of them on the assumption that they were originally uttered by the *Christian* prophets: but this is only a working hypothesis, and may be rejected without substantially impairing the expositions based upon it, though it is an hypothesis for which much more might be said than has been adduced in the text. When I wrote out these discourses for the press I had not studied the *Didaché*, though of course I had read it and had shared in the general interest awakened by the discovery of that remarkable and most valuable document. I had not even observed the stress laid by the Writer of it on the function of the prophet in the Church of his time (about 100 A.D.). In his admirable essay on "The Origin of the Christian Ministry," however, my friend Dr. Sanday has wrought out that point with so masterly a hand that it can no longer escape the attention even of the dullest.<sup>1</sup> He shews clearly, I think, that the teachers of the Christian Church, at least for a full generation after St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians were written, were not the bishops or presbyters, nor indeed any of the official per-

<sup>1</sup> See *The Expositor* for February, 1887.

sons who live again in their modern representatives. He produces good reasons for believing that bishops and presbyters, as well as deacons, had up to this time been "chiefly occupied in dispensing alms, in organizing hospitality, in keeping the rolls of church-membership, in conducting the correspondence with foreign Churches, in representing the Church in its contact with the world, and in providing the material accessories of the Church services:" and that it was only when "the splendid dawn of Spirit-given illumination faded into the common light of day" that they were called upon "to devote themselves more regularly and permanently to a still higher function, the direct approach to God in worship and thanksgiving."

"What," he asks, "are those mysterious figures of 'apostle,' 'prophet,' and 'teacher,' who flit here and there across the stage (of the New Testament Church), but nowhere stay long enough to be interrogated?" And in his reply he shews that "clearly they were not the unsubstantial forms that they are apt to appear to us." "The *Didaché*," he goes on to say, "gives us glimpses of the same figures. . . . We see them moving about from Church to Church, highly honoured wherever they went; pledged to poverty, and taking away nothing with them from the Churches which they visit, but if they (or rather specially the prophets) choose to settle in any community, gladly supported by the first-fruits and gifts of the members; preaching the word; conducting the Sunday services, especially the Eucharist, where the prophet alone is not bound to any set form."

And elsewhere he adds, "The *Didaché* makes it clear that, wherever he was present, the prophet took the lead in such services. He has indeed a special privilege in connection with them, which he does not share with any one else. He alone is allowed the untrammelled use of *extempore* prayer."

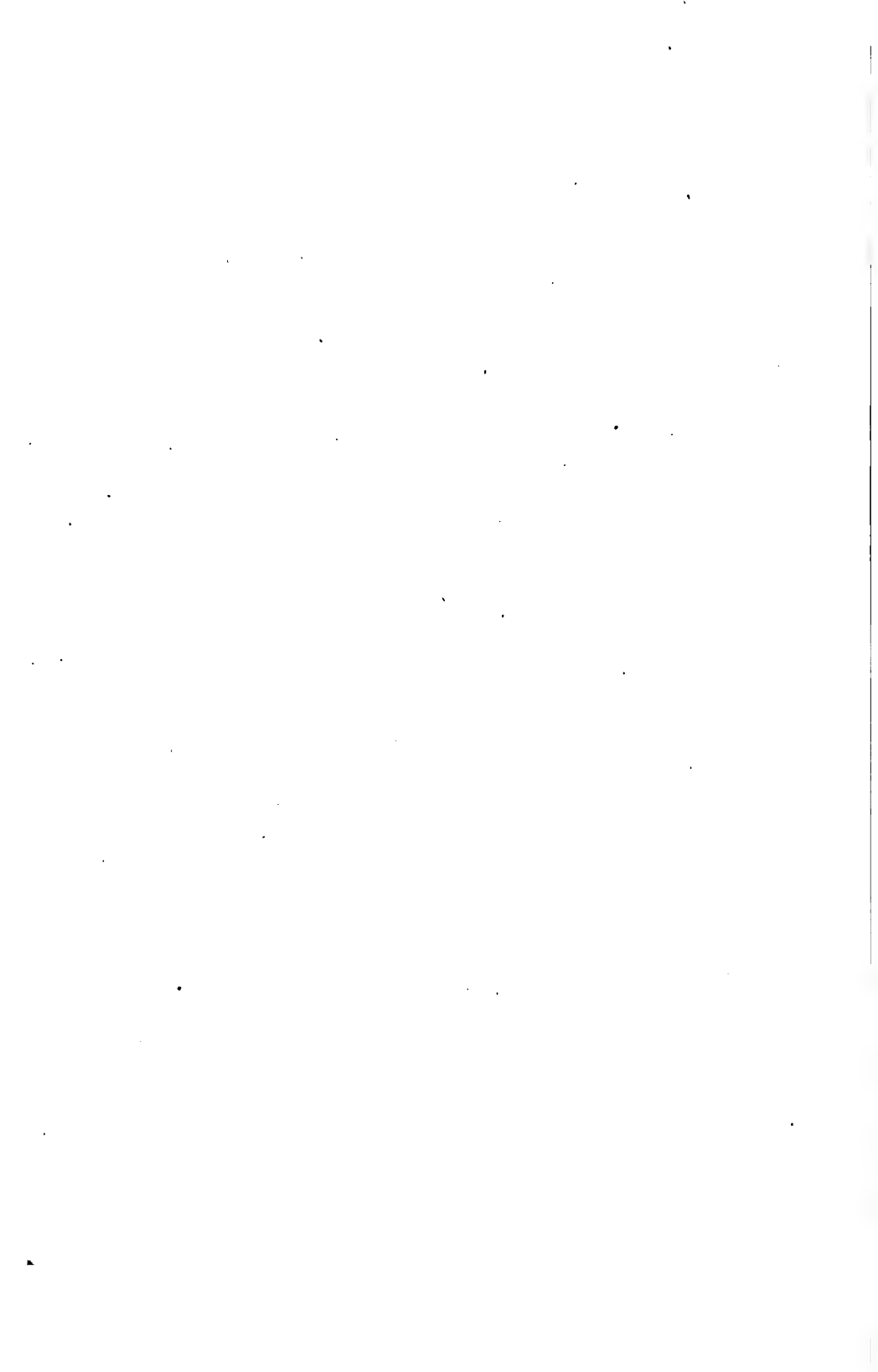
This vivid picture of the function and work of the Christian prophets lends a new force, as the attentive reader will see for himself, to the hypothesis on which I have based my exposition of the Faithful Sayings, and renders it much more probable that we owe these Sayings to the holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost to teach and preach with all freedom and authority in all the Churches.

I have only to add that, since the publication of Volume II., I have discovered that in the discourse on "Sentiment and Sentimentalism" I must have been much more indebted to a sermon preached by Rev. A. Mackennal, B.A., and published in *The Life of Christian Consecration* than I was at all aware, though I am still puzzled to say how I contracted the debt which I now gratefully acknowledge ; and that I shall be obliged to any critic who will point out any flaw in the argument of the discourse on "The Last Gospel of Science" (contained in the present Volume), and to any friend who will advise me of a reply to it which might else escape my notice.

NOTTINGHAM,

February 21, 1887.





# CONTENTS.

---

## I.

### THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.

#### I. HEREDITARY BIAS AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

- Exodus* xx. 5, 6.—“ I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto a thousand generations of them that love me and keep my commandments.” PAGE
- Ezekiel* xviii. 20, 21.—“ The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die ” . 1

## II.

### THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.

#### 2. NEIGHBOURLY INFLUENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

- Ezekiel* xviii. 13.—“ His blood shall be upon him.”
- Ezekiel* iii. 18.—“ His blood will I require at thy hand.”
- Ezekiel* xxxiii. 6.—“ His blood will I require at the watchman's hand.”
- Ezekiel* xxxiv. 10.—“ I will require my sheep at their hand ” . 16

## III.

## THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.

## 3. THE STANDARD OF JUDGMENT.

<i>Ezekiel</i> xviii. 5-9.—“If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, and hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour’s wife, . . . and hath not wronged any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath clothed the naked with a garment ; he that hath not given forth on usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly : he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God ” . . . . .	PAGE 30
--	------------

## IV.

## THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.

## 4. THE GOSPEL OF MERCY.

<i>Ezekiel</i> xviii. 30-32.—“Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, that iniquity may not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions wherein ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : wherefore turn and live ” . . . . .	43
--	----

## V.

## “HE SENDETH SUN, HE SENDETH SHOWER.”

<i>Matthew</i> v. 45.—“For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ” . . . . .	58
--	----

---

CONTENTS.

---

xv

VI.

THE LAST GOSPEL OF SCIENCE.

<i>Micah</i> vi. 8.—“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good : and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?”	PAGE 70
---	------------

VII.

AY AND NAY TOO, NOT GOOD DIVINITY.

<i>2 Corinthians</i> i. 18.—“As God is true, our word toward you was not Yea and Nay”	84
--	----

VIII.

THE YEA AND THE AMEN OF GOD.

<i>2 Corinthians</i> i. 19, 20.—“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, . . . was not yea and nay, but in him is Yea. For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the Yea ; wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us”	97
--	----

IX.

MAN'S CRAVING FOR GOD.

<i>Psalms</i> xlii. 1, 2.—“As the hart panteth after the water- brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?”	
<i>Psalms</i> lxxxiv. 1, 2.—“How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh cry out unto the living God”	109

X.

HEMAN'S ELEGY.

<i>Psalms</i> lxxxviii.—“O Lord, the God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee,” &c.	123
---	-----

## XI.

## ETHAN'S PSALM.

- Psalm* lxxxix. 49.—“Lord, where are thy former mercies,  
which thou swarest unto David in thy faithfulness?” . 138

## XII.

## ASAPH'S THEOLOGY.

- Psalm* l. 23.—“Whoso sacrificeth thanksgiving glorifieth me ;  
and to him that ordereth his way (aright) will I shew the  
salvation of God.”

- Psalm* lxxvii. 10.—“And I said, This is my sorrow, that the  
hand of the Most High doth change” . . . . . 152

## XIII.

## THE UNCOVENANTED MERCIES OF GOD.

- Psalm* lxxxix. 1, 2.—“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord  
for ever ; with my mouth will I make known thy faithful-  
ness unto all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall  
be built up for ever ; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish  
in the very heavens” . . . . . 166

## XIV.

## THE DEATH OF MOSES.

- Deuteronomy* iii. 23-27.—“And I besought the Lord at that  
time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy  
servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand ; for what god  
is there, in heaven or in earth, that can do according to  
thy works, and according to thy mighty acts ? Let me go  
over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond  
Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord  
was wroth with me for your sakes, and hearkened not  
unto me : and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee ;  
speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the  
top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and north-  
ward, and southward, and eastward : and behold with  
thine eyes ; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan” . . . 181

XV.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

	PAGE
<i>Hebrews</i> xii. 1, 2.—“Wherefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin by which we are beset; and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured a cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” . . . . .	201

XVI.

THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

1. THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETS.

1 <i>Timothy</i> iv. 9.—“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation” . . . . .	223
--	-----

XVII.

THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE ADVENT.

1 <i>Timothy</i> i. 15.—“Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” . . . . .	238
--	-----

XVIII.

THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

3. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

2 <i>Timothy</i> ii. 11-13.—“Faithful is the saying: For if we died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him: if we should deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself” . . . . .	249
---	-----



## XIX.

## THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

## 4. THE CHRISTIAN CREED.

- Titus* iii. 4-8.—“But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life, according to hope. This is a faithful saying ” . . . . . 264

## XX.

## THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

## 5. PRACTICE THE END OF DOCTRINE.

- Titus* iii. 8.—“Faithful is the saying—and these things I will that thou constantly affirm—that those who have believed in God should maintain good works ” . . . . . 279

## XXI.

## THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

## 6. GODLINESS AND GYMNASTICS.

- 1 *Timothy* iv. 7-9.—“Exercise thyself unto godliness : for bodily exercise is profitable for a few things ; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance ” . . . . . 294

## XXII.

## THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

## 7. THE GENERAL SAVIOUR OF MANKIND.

- 1 *Timothy* iv. 9, 10.—“Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance : For this we both labour and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe ” . 310

XXIII.

THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

8. THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AN HONEST OCCUPATION.

- 1 Timothy* iii. 1.—“ Faithful is the saying : If a man seek the  
pastorate, he desireth a good employment ” . . . . . 323

XXIV.

THE IMPOTENT WOMAN.

- Luke* xiii. 10-17.—“ And he was teaching in one of the  
synagogues on the sabbath day. And, behold, a woman  
who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years ; and she was  
bent together, and could in no wise unbend herself,” &c. . 338

XXV.

LOVE AND LOVE'S REWARD.

AN EASTER SERMON.

- Mark* xvi. 5-7.—“ And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a  
young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white  
robe ; and they were amazed. And he saith unto them,  
Be not amazed ; ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who was  
crucified : he is risen ; he is not here ; behold the place  
where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples  
and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there  
shall ye see him, as he said unto you ” . . . . . 353

XXVI.

WHAT THE GOD-MAN REVEALS OF GOD AND MAN.

- John* i. 18.—“ He hath declared him ” . . . . . 367

XXVII.

THE MENACE OF ZEPHANIAH.

- Zephaniah* i. 2, 3.—“ Sweeping, I will sweep everything from  
the face of the earth, saith the Lord. I will sweep away  
man and beast. I will sweep away the fowl of the  
heaven, and the fish of the sea, and their offences with  
the sinners : and I will cut off man from the face of the  
earth, saith the Lord ” . . . . . 380

## XXVIII.

## BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?

<i>Luke</i> xvii. 17.—“Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?” . . . . .	PAGE 397
--	-------------

## XXIX.

## THE SPRING AND ITS MAKER.

<i>Isaiah</i> xxii. 11.—“And ye make a basin between the walls for the water of the old pool; but ye do not look to him who made it, nor have respect unto him that fashioned it long ago” . . . . .	413
--	-----

## XXX.

## THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

<i>Isaiah</i> i. 18.—“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” . . . . .	427
---	-----

## XXXI.

## THE SPECIAL MEANING OF COMMON THINGS.

2 <i>Samuel</i> v. 24.—“And let it be that, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself” . . . . .	441
---	-----

9

I.

*THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.*

I.—HEREDITARY BIAS AND PERSONAL  
RESPONSIBILITY.

"I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation of them that hate me, and shewing mercy unto a thousand generations of them that love me and keep my commandments."—EXODUS xx. 5, 6.

"The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son ; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die."—EZEKIEL xviii. 20, 21.

THAT these two passages seem to contradict each other, no frank and honest-minded man will hesitate to admit, although both are found in the Word of Him who cannot lie. That they really contradict each other, no reflective and experienced man will be forward to assert : for reflection will have taught him that truths which complete often appear to contradict one another ; while history and experience will have taught him that

most wise teachers emphasize one truth at one time, and another at another, as men need to hear them, and that many such teachers intentionally throw the truths they wish to enforce into paradoxical, or contradictory, forms, in order to arrest the attention of the careless or more deeply to impress the mind of the attentive. But to affirm the centripetal is not to deny the centrifugal force. To affirm the value of knowledge is not to deny that virtue may be still more valuable. To affirm that a man is kind is not to deny that he is just. The whole round of truth cannot be compressed into a single lesson, or into a single text; while the conditions to which a teacher of truth has to adapt himself often render it both expedient and right that he should assert one truth strongly, and without more than a general reference to other truths by which it is modified or supplemented. Are men never to have any light until they can bear to look undazzled on the full-orbed splendour of the meridian sun?

The Divine method, as we are taught by the Divine Man, is to lead men gradually from the twilight of approaching dawn to the glory of noonday; to give them truth "as they are able to bear it;" to adapt it to the limitations of their intellect as well as to the hardness of their hearts. And, therefore, we should expect to find a growing revelation in the Word of God. We should expect to find one truth here and another there, the later stages of revelation unfolding the germs of its earlier stages, bringing new things to light as well as old; giving milk to babes, but replacing milk with

strong meat when the babes have grown up into men. The words, "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little," though a woeful mistranslation of the Hebrew,<sup>1</sup> happily express the method of Scripture, as of all wise teaching: and the two passages before us, so far from contradicting each other, are simply an illustration of that method,—as I will try to shew you.

1. The appropriateness of the teaching of Moses and Ezekiel, its pertinence to the respective times at which they spoke, and to the moral conditions of the time, is obvious, and may be demonstrated in few words. Moses was speaking to men who had just emerged from the house of bondage, and who had been demoralized by cruel and excessive toils under the taskmaster's lash. Now that they were enfranchised, they needed above all to be trained to a wise use of their freedom; and he was laying down the limits within which that freedom was to move, providing them with the ethical moulds into which it was to be run. Only by obedience to the laws written on their being, the laws by which their lives are really ruled, whether they know it or not, can men rise into their true liberty, the liberty of a voluntary and glad obedience. Moses was teaching the Israelites what these laws are, and appealing to every motive of gratitude and hope and fear by which obedience to them could be induced. He reminded them of what they owed to God their Redeemer, and of what they owed to themselves, of what they owed to their neighbours, and

<sup>1</sup> See *The Expositor* (First Series) Vol. I. pp. 98 ff.



of what they owed to those who should come after them. To men who had newly won personal freedom, what truth was more necessary than that of personal responsibility? Responsibility is but the other half, the other side, of freedom. And men never so much need to be reminded that they must answer for what they do as when they have just been set free to do what they will.

It was this necessity which Moses met. As he gave them the ten commandments which he had received from God, "the statutes of life" by obedience to which they would become truly free, he taught the enfranchised Israelites in the most emphatic terms, not only that it would be well or ill with *them* as they obeyed or disobeyed these commandments, but also that it would be well or ill with their children after them. To save them from a merely selfish pursuit of their own interests, he appealed to their strongest unselfish affections—to their paternal love and their patriotism—by warning them that both the good and the ill men do live after them; and by entreating them, as they loved their children and their children's children, *i.e.* as they would seek the future well-being and glory of the Hebrew race, to keep the Divine statutes, and to do only that which was lawful and right. And was not that a truth very suitable for the time?

Ezekiel, on the other hand, was speaking to men whose fathers had sinned against the commandments of life generation after generation; to men who, for their own sins and the sins of their fathers, had been deprived of the liberty they had abused, and condemned to a cruel

captivity. What *they* needed, therefore, was not to have their personal responsibility enforced upon them,—that was convincingly impressed upon them by the bondage into which they had been thrust by their personal and ancestral iniquity ; but to receive some message of hope, to be assured that the bitter entail of transgression might be broken, that it need not continue and accumulate for ever ; that, if they renounced their sins, neither their own guilt nor that of their fathers would debar them from mercy, from deliverance, from freedom ; that so soon as they turned to God, He would turn to them ; that when once his law was written on their hearts, redemption would draw nigh, freedom would be recovered. And this was the very message, the very consolation and hope, which Ezekiel brought them, which he develops in this Chapter xviii. with most impressive iteration, with a grace and fulness which could hardly fail to touch and strengthen their hearts. Like Moses, then, Ezekiel spoke “the *present* truth,” addressed himself to the conditions and wants of his time.

2. But if these truths were pertinent and appropriate each in its season, they must remain true even when they are taught at the same moment, in the same breath. “Once true, always true,” is a sound maxim if only it be fairly applied, if only we bear in mind that the same truth may turn a very different face on us as we take up a different attitude toward it. That the truth taught by Moses was an eternal truth, and that this eternal truth is a present fact in human experience, we shall admit so soon as we consult our own experience : that

it is not inconsistent with the truth taught by Ezekiel we shall see so soon as we understand exactly what it was that each of these great prophets taught.

What *did* Moses teach? Too commonly he is assumed to have taught nothing more than that the evil which men do lives after them, that *the sins* of the fathers are visited upon the children generation after generation; and so this half-truth is turned into a baneful lie; for the lie which is half a truth is of all lies the most effective and pernicious. But what he really teaches is that *all* the actions of men, good as well as bad, live after them; that they all modify and determine the inheritance which they transmit to their children. The God whom he portrays is a God (Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7) "full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," as well as a God who will "by no means clear the guilty," and who "visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." The beneficent aspect of this entail is emphasized in every one of the four passages<sup>1</sup> in which he mentions its hostile aspect, though we so often assume that it is only the sadder and darker portion of our lot on which he dwells. In every case his words include our whole inheritance, with its strange blending of bitter and sweet, good and ill, darkness and light.

And taken thus, in its true form, its whole scope, no fact is more familiar to us, or is more frequently pressed

<sup>1</sup> Exodus xx. 5; xxxiv. 7; Numbers xiv. 18; Deuteronomy v. 9.

upon us whether by modern science or by modern literature. With science, the transmission of specific ancestral qualities is a constant and favourite theme ; and as science largely dominates all our forms of thought, it is also a theme which is constantly handled even in what are called the lighter kinds of our literature, in our novels, dramas, poems—notably, for example, in the works of George Eliot. There never was a time, I suppose, when the conviction was so widespread that we do suffer for our fathers' sins, for their imprudences as well as their vices, or when this conviction had so broad and stable a basis both in scientific induction and recorded facts. We suffer, and know that we suffer, for the sins of our fathers inwardly and outwardly, in character and condition, in mind, body, and estate. It is not only that we are well or ill trained according as they are wise or unwise, and that our start in life is auspicious or inauspicious ; it is not only that we derive from them some trick of feature or some tone of voice ; nor is it only that our worldly goods and possessions may be small or large according as they have been diligent and thrifty or indolent and extravagant : but they may also transmit to us some inward bias which will go far to decide our fate,—some taint of blood, some irritability of nerve, some defect of will, some ethical bent, which will impair our sanity as well as our health, or render us an easy prey to the temptations to which we are exposed. And hence there never was a time when we more needed to bear in mind that it is our *whole* inheritance which we derive from them ; that if

we suffer for their vices, we also profit by their virtues : that they have moulded the entire world on which we enter after their own image, with all its advantages as well as all its disadvantages ; that we owe to them all that makes for health, sanity, and righteousness, as well as all that depraves and impoverishes us. They framed the laws which secure our political freedom, and wrote the books in which we find our best wisdom, and reared the churches in which we worship, as well as made the roads by which we travel, and invented the manufactures and laid down the lines of commerce by which we grow rich. We have little which, directly or indirectly, we do not owe to them. So that before any man complains of any evil bias or condition which he has inherited from them, he should remember how much of good and advantage he has also received at their hands ; he is bound to consider whether, to this inheritance of mingled good and ill, he would prefer to stand, isolated and alone, in a world in which he would have to begin everything for himself, with no aids from those who have gone before him. If he would not, if he shrinks from the mere thought of that condition of solitary disadvantage, let him be content with the complex inheritance bequeathed him, and make the best of it he can.

3. Again, if we would either do justice to the teaching of Moses, or foster the courage and hopefulness which will arm and nerve us for the conduct of life, we must bear in mind that, according to him, not only do we receive our whole inheritance, with its mingled good and ill, from or through our fathers, but also that the good

in it is far more potent, and far more enduring, than the evil. No one at all accustomed to weigh the meaning and force of words can fail to mark that, while Moses clearly reveals the divine law which carries the punishment of men's sins on into the succeeding generations, he lays far more stress on the more merciful and benignant aspect of this law of retribution. Let me read again words which I have already quoted once, and do you mark on which branch of the law his emphasis falls and rests. "The Lord, the Lord God, *full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin ;* and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." Who does not feel as he listens to such words as these that it is the merciful rather than the judicial aspect of the law of retribution which stands first in the writer's thoughts ; and that "the pencil of the Holy Ghost" labours far more to depict the benignity of Him who gave the law than to clothe Him in the terrors of judgment ?

The general tone of the passage is the more strikingly confirmed the more closely we examine it : above all in the phrase "shewing" or "*keeping mercy for thousands ;*" for the true rendering of that phrase, as our best scholars now agree, is, "*keeping mercy for a thousand generations,*" although this rendering is only given in the margin of the Revised Version. Why it is not in the text, I do not know ; but lest any one should infer from this fact that there is room to doubt whether Moses taught that,

while the disobedience of the fathers is to be punished *to the third and fourth* generation, their obedience is to be rewarded *for a thousand*, let me refer you to a passage which puts the question beyond all reach of doubt. If you turn to Deuteronomy vii. 9 and 10, you will find these words both in the Authorized and in the Revised Versions : " Know that the Lord thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments *to a thousand generations* ; and repayeth them that hate him *to their face* to destroy them : he will not be *slack* to him that hateth him, but will repay him *to his face*." These words can have only one meaning. They can only mean that, while the punishment of men's sins will be prompt and speedy, the reward of their righteousness will last on through generation after generation, and will virtually know no end.

The same God, then, who threatens to visit men's disobedience on three or four generations, does promise to the obedient that He will keep mercy for their children to a thousand generations. And what is that but saying, in our modern language, that the good men do, or inherit, is far more potent, and far more enduring in its effects, than the evil which they do or inherit ?

And there is much in human life to sustain and illustrate this gracious promise. In our despondent or pessimist moods we may quote the words which Shakespeare puts into the lips of Mark Antony in the most troubled hour of a life full of violent excitements—when he came to bury Cæsar, not to praise him ; we may sigh and say,

The evil that men do lives after them ;  
The good is oft interred with their bones.

But that is not true. If good be not more potent and enduring than evil, if it does not live longer and work more effectually, how are we to account for the progress of mankind ? how should there be any progress, any movement onward and upward, in a world in which, as we are often told, evil is more common and more prevalent than good ? It is nothing short of astonishing to mark how soon the wicked, even when they have been in great power, are forgotten, and they and the evil they have done are buried out of our sight ; while even one heroically good deed, however humbly and modestly it may have been done, is remembered and cited long after the doer of it has mouldered into dust. It is simply amazing to mark how speedily a race recovers even from the most dreadful and destructive calamity—from the horrors of war and invasion, for instance—as we may see for ourselves both in America and France ; while they rarely lose any upward step which they have once gained. If life were not a blessing on the whole, why should men cling to it as they do, when any “bare bodkin” would suffice to relieve them from it ? That there are many and heart-rending miseries in the world must be admitted ; for men must suffer for their own and for their fathers’ sins if they are to be redeemed from them : but, after all, health is the rule, not disease ; sanity, not insanity ; obedience to law, not disobedience ; and even happiness, not misery, or the world would long since have come to an end. The



sins of those who hate God *are* visited to the third and fourth generation ; but for those that love Him and keep his commandments, He retains his mercy through a thousand generations.

4. Finally, Ezekiel, speaking on the same authority with Moses, expressly declares that the children's teeth are not to be set on edge because the fathers have eaten sour grapes ; that every man will have to answer only for himself and for what he himself has done ; that the righteousness of the righteous shall be *upon him*, and the wickedness of the wicked *upon him* ; that the soul that sinneth *it* shall die. In other words, he affirms that, whatever we may inherit from our fathers, our inheritance will not be suffered to determine our fate, whether in this world or in the world to come. And, as I have confessed, the two affirmations, that of Moses and that of Ezekiel, wear a strong face of contradiction, at least to the casual and inattentive reader who separates them from their respective contexts, and from the conditions under which they were severally uttered. But now that we have studied what Moses really taught, and found that he does not accuse God of punishing one man for the sin of another, but asserts rather, that every man receives from his fathers an inheritance of mingled good and evil, *in which the good is far more potent and far more enduring than the evil*, what becomes of the apparent contradiction between the two ? It simply disappears. For what Moses teaches is true, and what Ezekiel teaches is also true. If Moses teaches that, through the mercy of God, the whole inheritance won by our fathers is entailed on us,



perplexed by a weight of thought, so that we are constantly tempted to take up facts and truths in their darker significance. We are quick to recognize the transmission of ancestral vices, perils, defects, quick to mark how the deformities and taints and faults of even some comparatively remote ancestors may reappear in their descendants; but we often fail to notice either how their sturdier and better qualities, their capacities and dexterities, their virtues and excellences, also reappear; or what a surprising power there is in children to cast out morbid ancestral taints, to resist and conquer any evil bias of blood or nerve which they bring into the world with them. And yet is not every new child born into this old world a new creature, an unknown quantity, an original personality, whose character and course no knowledge of the family history will enable you to predict? Do you not often see children of bad and violent tempered parents who are remarkable for the sweetness and patience of their temper? If a young man has been well nurtured and trained, if, above all, he has been steadied and sustained by the grace of God, by the power of Religion, by the unseen forces of the new eternal life,—do you not literally see him “born again” and “born from above,” so that he wholly conquers any tendency to vice, or even to insanity, which he may have received as a legacy from those who went before him?

God is always just, my brethren—just, and something more than just. And even if a man should not prevail over his hereditary bias to any form of evil in the

present life, yet, if he strive against it and pray against it, his ultimate victory is sure. He will not long suffer for any sins but his own, and his very sufferings will help to redeem him from their chain. His fate, at least in the world to come, will not be determined by the sins of his fathers. He who keeps mercy for a thousand generations will not fail him at the last. And if, as in some cases it does, the end seem long in coming, the years of eternity have no end. There is time, there is plenty of time, in which to compensate him for all that he has endured. And, now and then, I have seen signs which pointed to that approaching compensation; for I have seen more than one man die who, in the irresponsible ravings of mental disease, has given no doubtful proof that, while hidden from us under a dark, impenetrable cloud, he was still under a Divine care and discipline, and fast ripening for heaven.

Know, then, and know for your consolation and support under all the mysteries and burdens of time, that the Lord our God is a faithful God, keeping covenant and mercy with them that love Him to a thousand generations, though He will by no means clear the guilty; and that He does not clear, but punishes and corrects the guilty, in order that they too may turn and live.

## II.

### THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.

#### II.—NEIGHBOURLY INFLUENCE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

"His blood shall be upon *him*."—EZEKIEL xviii. 13.

"His blood will I require at *thy* hand."—EZEKIEL iii. 18.

"His blood will I require at *the watchman's* hand."—EZEKIEL xxxiii. 6.

"I will require My sheep at *their* hand."—EZEKIEL xxxiv. 10.

WHEN Joshua suspected the children of Israel of renouncing the worship of Jehovah, he assumed that they would either revert to the gods whom their fathers had served beyond the River, or adopt the worship of the neighbouring Amorites among whom they dwelt (Joshua xxiv. 15). The only alternative he could conceive for them, if they were base enough to cast off the God who had redeemed them, was, that they should yield to their ancestral bias or that they should yield to the influence of their neighbours. And, it must be admitted, I think, that, after the tendencies and conditions we inherit from our fathers, the influence of our neighbours tells more decisively on us than any other, and does more to mould our character and shape our lot.

The opponents of Freewill, from the Pantheist who believes the Divine Will to be the only, as well as the immanent, Will of the universe, down to the Materialist who holds man to be the mere creature of his organization and environment, lay the gravest emphasis both on the temperament we derive from our ancestors and on the social influences and conditions by which we are surrounded, and often speak as if these were the main, or even the sole, factors which determine our character, and therefore determine our destiny. And even we, though we may have no scientific or philosophical dogma to support ; even we, however inobservant or unreflective we have been, can hardly have failed to notice either the likeness which obtains between children and their parents, or how strange a power the social world in which we live has of fashioning us after its own image, and so making us all more or less alike.

Custom, fashion, the habits of the class in which we are bred, or into which we have risen, go far to determine not only the clothes we shall wear, the hours we shall keep, the vocations and the avocations we shall pursue, but also the very thoughts we are to think, the emotions we are to cherish, as well as the modes in which they are to be expressed, and even the creed we are to hold and the worship we are to render. Nothing is harder for most of us than to resist any large wave of thought or emotion which may sweep over the neighbourhood or the community of which we form a part, however transient it may be. To stand aside, to criticize it, to give it neither more nor less weight than it deserves,

requires a force of character, a coolness of judgment, a strength of conviction, which few display. And hence we often see even reasonable men and cultivated women unduly moved, and sometimes quite carried off their feet, not only by the issues of a general election, or the publication of a new scientific hypothesis or of a so-called theological "heresy," but even by the verdict pronounced on an imprudent and fanatical Newspaper editor, or, worse still, by the removal of a superfluous elephant from our Zoological Gardens! The power of the world immediately around us, its power to move us in the very depths of our being, may be inferred from the obvious fact that the social grade in which we find ourselves determines at least the whole form and manner of our life, so that our very tastes, habits, and pursuits differ according as we belong to the labouring class, or the trading, or the professional, or the literary, or the aristocratic class. Who doubts, who can doubt, that even his political and religious convictions depend very largely on the family into which he is born and the beliefs amid which he is reared; and that he is Liberal or Conservative, Conformist or Nonconformist, chiefly because, trained in certain ways of thought in his youth, when he is older he does not depart from them? If any one of us—or, that you may give an impartial verdict, let me rather say, if any grave deacon of any other Church than this,—had been born, supposing that possible, of Chinese, or Hindoo, or Arab, or African parents, and had been bred as in that case he must, is it not almost certain that at this present moment he would have been

a perfectly respectable Mandarin, with a weakness perhaps for burning scented slips of wood to the memory of his ancestors ; or a venerated Brahmin, cherishing his scarlet thread and worshipping the sacred cow ; or a grave and turbaned Mussulman, walking in all the precepts of the Koran blameless ; or a black and bloodthirsty savage, bowing down before the ugliest idols and trembling at the anger of the wizards of his tribe ?

"The tyrant Custom" is so potent with us all, and the influence of the little world in which we are nurtured is so far-reaching, it enters so deeply into our being and does so much to form our character, that we can hardly wonder if men who dwell much upon it conclude that, taken together with our hereditary endowment, it suffices to account for what we are, and leaves no room for the exercise of free will, no scope for individual choice, and therefore no room and scope for personal responsibility. To put it at its lowest, the influence of our neighbours on us is so great that we should be disappointed, we should feel he had been guilty of a grave and fatal omission, had Ezekiel, the Prophet of Individualism, failed to recognize and discuss this influence ; had he not shewn us that it was in his mind even when he most strongly asserts our personal accountability to God. Happily, it *was* in his mind ; he *has* taken it into account. And as we have already heard him argue that, whatever we may inherit from our fathers, we are free *to use* that inheritance as we will, *and have only to answer for our use of it*, so, now, we are to hear how he reconciles, or to ask how *we* are to reconcile, the two assertions, that



men are responsible for each other, and yet are responsible each man only for himself: how it can be true or just that if a man sin, and die in his sins, his blood shall be on his own head, and yet his blood may be required at the hand of more than one of his neighbours.

In three of the Chapters from which I have quoted a few words in my text, Ezekiel not only acknowledges the influence which our neighbours exert upon us, but expressly declares that they are *responsible* for that influence. In Chapter iii. Verses 16-21, he is describing the marvellous and splendid visions by which he was called to the prophetic function and work, and we learn that from the very first he knew he was called to teach men their individual responsibility to God. But, curiously enough, the very vision which reveals his call to *this* work, the vision which convinces him that his special function will be to teach that every man must answer for himself, that the righteousness of the righteous will be upon *him*, and the wickedness of the wicked upon *him*, also warns him that he himself may be responsible for their sins, and therefore for their doom; that *he* may have to answer for their righteousness or their wickedness, although they must answer for their own. He is to be God's watchman for and over Israel. When God bids him warn the wicked man that his wickedness is only another name for death, if he should fail to carry him that warning or to urge it upon him with all his force, "the wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at *thy* hand;" whereas if the Prophet faithfully convey the Divine warning, and the wicked man will not hear nor turn

from his evil ways, "he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul." So, again, if a righteous man turn from his righteousness and commit iniquity, and die in his iniquity because the Watchman has not warned him of his danger, "he shall die in his sin, but his blood will I require at *thy* hand;" whereas if the warning be given, and taken, "he shall surely live, and thou hast delivered thy soul."

In Chapter xxxiii. Verses 1-9, the responsibility of Ezekiel for the fate of his neighbours is generalized; it is extended to any and every man whether ordained by God or chosen by the people to be a sentinel or watchman; to any and every man, *i.e.* who is called to teach men, to warn them of their moral danger, to rebuke them for their sins. According as he is faithful or unfaithful in the discharge of his duty, they will die or live; but if they die, their blood will be required at the watchman's hand, while if they live, he will share their life and their reward. But here, too, strange to say, this impressive exhortation on neighbourly influence and responsibility is immediately followed (Verses 10-20) by a new declaration of every man's sole and personal responsibility to God as keen and emphatic as that which we find in Chapter xviii., the very Charter of Individualism. Verses 10-20 are, indeed, simply a repetition, or summary, of the contents of Chapter xviii., in which all its leading and familiar phrases recur.

Ezekiel affirms, then, and affirms twice over, that the prophet must answer for his neighbours in the very same breath in which he affirms that every man must answer

for himself. And this word "prophet," if translated into its modern equivalents, includes a great company of the foremost men of every age. For a prophet was a poet ; a prophet was a preacher of righteousness ; a prophet was bound both to discover new truths and to apply and enforce old truths ; like the well-instructed scribe he was to bring both new and old things from the treasury of God. So that we may fairly embrace in the scope of Ezekiel's declaration 'all who do most to form the thoughts and influence the conduct of men—our poets, preachers, moralists ; our statesmen and political economists, our discoverers and teachers whether in science or philosophy, theology or ethics.

Chapter xxxiv. brings yet another, and a most powerful, class within his scope. For here he elaborates the responsibility of those whom he calls "the shepherds." Now "shepherd," or "shepherd of the people," was one of the earliest names given to kings. And in this remarkable Chapter, in this impassioned denunciation of "the shepherds," it is the rulers and governors of Israel whom the Prophet charges with having neglected, scattered, plundered the flock committed to their charge,—with feeding *themselves* instead of feeding the sheep, and suffering the unfed, unguided, flock to wander unsought and uncared for in all dry and desert places. It is against these unfaithful rulers and governors that the solemn and terrible oath is launched : "As I live, saith the Lord God, forasmuch as my sheep have become a prey, . . . meat to all the beasts of the field, because . . . my shepherds did not search for my sheep, but the shepherds fed them-

selves, and fed not my sheep, therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am *against* the shepherds, *and I will require my sheep at their hands.*"

Translate this charge also into its modern equivalents, and what it comes to is this : that God is against every ruling class which cares for its own interests rather than for the public welfare ; that all our rulers, all who are in authority over us, from the private master to the public magistrate, are responsible to Him, and must answer to Him for their influence over us ; that the whole governing as well as the whole teaching class are guilty of the blood of as many as perish through their selfishness or neglect.

Ezekiel, therefore, flings his net very wide. No conspicuously influential class is omitted from his view. Poets and philosophers, men of science and men of genius, pastors, preachers, priests ; schoolmasters and professors, magistrates, statesmen, rulers, kings,—all these neighbours of ours influence us, and all will have to answer for the influence they exert upon us. If that influence enlighten, elevate, enrich, and sanctify us, they will have their reward, and share in every reward bestowed on us ; if it injure, degrade, impoverish, or destroy us, our blood will be required at their hands.

And yet this is the prophet of Individualism ! this is the prophet who above all others insists that "the soul that sinneth *it* shall die ;" that no man can answer for another, but that every man must answer for himself ! this is the prophet who affirms of every man that dies in

his iniquity, "his blood shall be upon *him*;" the prophet who felt it was his special mission to teach that, because all souls are his, God will judge us one by one, and every one "according to his ways"!

How are we to reconcile the apparent contradiction, not of his words alone, but of the facts which lie behind his words, the facts which his words call to our remembrance?

Nothing can be simpler when once we get the clue. For, first of all, men *are* answering for themselves when they have to answer for their influence on their fellows. For they influence us by their character as revealed in their words and deeds: and is it not just that their character should determine their fate, that by their words and by their deeds they should be justified or condemned? What is the watchman for but to watch and to sound the alarm of coming peril? What is the shepherd for but to guide, feed, and defend the flock? If the watchman give the alarm, if the shepherd care for the flock, he is but doing his duty; if he fail, he is obviously neglecting his duty: and for what are men to be held responsible if not for the discharge of duty and its neglect? In like manner teachers who do not teach the highest truth they know, because they think truth itself may be dangerous; poets who use their high gifts to lower the thoughts of men and to inflame their passions, under some flimsy pretence of "art for art's sake," instead of elevating their thoughts, and lifting the fair ideals of life before their eyes; rulers who, in place of devoting themselves to the welfare of their subjects, bury

themselves in self-indulgence or riot in oppression ; statesmen who seek some private or party end instead of labouring for the general good, the public weal—are they not all unfaithful in their several vocations ? neglecting their plainest personal duties, and therefore justly incurring a heavy and perilous responsibility ? Is it not fair that they should be judged by their works, or, as Ezekiel has it, by their “ways,” and condemned for the neglect of their proper functions, their abuse of the high place and gifts entrusted to them ?

And, on the other hand, if we yield to the evil influences rather than to the good influences by which we are encompassed, we are justly answerable for yielding to them : for we may resist evil as well as yield to it. Where choice is free, we are accountable for the choice we make. And, whatever the inheritance bequeathed us by our fathers, whatever the social influences by which we are moulded, are we not free to make what use of them we will ? If we choose to bend to the influence of our rulers and teachers—and very few children do even that without a struggle—or if we choose to bend even to the influence of mere custom or the fashion of the moment, we *may* bend to it ; but if we choose to resist it, we *can* resist it. Nothing will ever persuade the plain common sense of men who have no theory to maintain that the whole secret of Man is to be found in his organization and environment. There is an original and incalculable force in every life, and, much more, in every soul. Even a plant, out of the multitude of influences by which it is surrounded, selects those to which it will yield,

which it will take advantage of and assimilate with itself; and using these selected influences, it may evolve some improved mechanism conducive to its welfare, which even Science cannot anticipate, and transmit a new power or a new beauty to its offspring. An animal is still more free and self-determinative: while there is that in the spirit of man which is capable of defying whatever is injurious whether in hereditary tendency or neighbourly pressure. We instinctively demand that it shall defy it, although we make large allowance for it when it fails, or when it only partially succeeds. We punish the criminal, whatever the bias or the associations which urge him on to crime. We scorn those who give themselves blindly into the hands of their rulers and spiritual guides, or overmuch defer to the power of use and wont, though we admit its power to be great. "Slaves of fashion," "creatures of custom," "fanatic," "courtier," "priest-ridden," are all terms of contempt or reproach. We blame men for being swept down by a stream which they have it in them to stem, and which, we say, they ought to stem; or we mourn that they should be too indolent and easy-going to exert their natural force and resist the influences to which they succumb. The general human conscience sturdily protests against any dogma which denies man's freedom of choice and action, even though it relieve him of the dread burden of personal responsibilities, whether the dogma be taught in the name of Science or the name of Religion. We feel that we *are* free; and hence we confess that we must be responsible.

No doubt it is easy for us to brood over the power of the tendencies we inherit from our fathers, and of the social framework which, now more than ever, seems to compress us all into one shape and mould us all on a single pattern, till we are tempted to conclude that little or nothing is left to our own option, that our individuality itself is simply the outcome of our organization and environment. If our start in life and our outfit are determined for us by our fathers, if our vocation, manners, customs, our modes of thought, intercourse, and expression, depend mainly on the accidents of birth and nurture, on the age and the class into which we are born and in whose habits we are reared,—what, we may ask, is left us, that we should be responsible for what we are and what we do? But no sooner do we reach this point than instinct, reason, conscience, all revolt against us. “The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, if we are underlings.” Nothing left us! Nay, *all* is left us: for whatever we inherit from our ancestors and whatever we receive from our neighbours, it rests with us to determine the spirit which we bring to our inheritance and in which we respond to the social influences of our time: and it is on this inbred and incommunicable spirit that the whole moral complexion of our life depends. If this innate and inalienable sense of personal responsibility is not a mere delusion, if the whole system of human judicature is not an organized injustice, it is but just that, in the sight of God, the righteousness of the righteous should be upon *him*, and the wickedness of the wicked upon *him*, whatever the influences that make



for righteousness or unrighteousness to which the evil and the good are alike exposed.

In conclusion. When we pursue this train of thought, we are prone to see its bearing on others rather than on ourselves. Fuller, whose wit often hides his wisdom from us, reminds us that we are all far more ready to fling dirt in our neighbours' faces than to wash our own face clean. And how often do we illustrate his maxim by brooding over the dark taint, or evil bent, or perilous weakness, we have received from our fathers, or by reflecting on the many hindrances to an honest, righteous, and godly life which the habits and customs of Society throw in our way, instead of taking heed to ourselves that *we* transmit none but healthy qualities and a pure inheritance to our children, and that all *our* influence on our neighbours shall be wholesome and pure and good. Yet, obviously, if our heart be set to hallow all we find, our main preoccupation will be *to make the best* of our character and our lot, our ancestral inheritance and our social conditions, both that we may ourselves be approved by the merciful Judge eternal for having been faithful whether in few things or many; and that our children and our neighbours may be the better for us, and, not the worse. Let us, then, set and keep this pure and kindly aim before us; for, if we do, we shall daily discover, not only our need of his help who is the Father of us all, but also how ready He is to help us in every time of need: we shall daily have recourse to Him who has Himself taught us that He is Neighbour to all who have fallen into the captivity of

evil, and their Neighbour that He may prove Himself their Saviour and their Friend.

Think well ! Do-well will follow thought,  
And in the fatal sequence of this world  
An evil thought may soil thy children's blood.\*

And while, for ourselves, we cherish this deep and watchful sense of our own responsibility for what we are and what we do, let us also cherish the largest charity for our neighbours, and the hopes which that charity will infallibly inspire. It is because we recognize the immense power of hereditary bias and social condition that we pity even as we punish those who fall into crime, and make their very punishment corrective in the hope that, by the corrections of justice, they may be restored and led to a better mind. And is God less just, less considerate, less kind, than we are ? If He is not, must not his punishments also be corrective ? must not his corrections be designed to turn the sinful from their evil ways that they may not die, but live ? Will less than this content Him, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, whether in this world or in any other ?

\* Tennyson's *Ancient Sage*.

### III.

#### *THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.*

##### III.—THE STANDARD OF JUDGMENT.

"If a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right, and hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, . . . and hath not wronged any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge, hath spoiled none by violence, hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath clothed the naked with a garment; he that hath not given forth on usury, neither hath taken any increase, that hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man, hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments to deal truly: he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God."—EZEKIEL xviii. 5-9.

IF every man must give account of himself unto God, if we must not rely either on hereditary bias or neighbourly influence as a sufficient excuse for our shortcomings and sins; if, in Tennyson's words, "sin be sin, not inherited fate, as many will say," it is of the last importance that we should know by what standard we are to be tried, and what are the pleas we may urge, when we stand before the Divine tribunal and have to speak with our Judge. The men of Ezekiel's time, like

the men of our own time, were very apt to attribute their sins, or the punishment of their sins, to the guilt of their fathers, or to the depraving influence of the heritage bequeathed them by their fathers. "Our fathers ate sour grapes, therefore our teeth are set on edge," was the popular and accepted apology for sin, the popular and accepted explanation of any judgment that befell them.<sup>1</sup> Of this explanation and excuse the Prophet had deprived them, by forbidding them, in the name of God, to use this proverb any more, and by assuring them, on the same awful authority, that, henceforth at least, "the son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father" any more than the father the iniquity of the son; that the righteousness of the righteous shall be on *him*, *him alone*, and the wickedness of the wicked on *him*, *him alone*.

But the Prophet who thus transfers the religious unit from the family or clan to the individual,<sup>2</sup> the Prophet who insists on every man's personal responsibility to God, is bound to teach men what it is for which they are responsible, bound to supply them with the standard by which they are to be judged. Nor does Ezekiel shrink from the obligation. The Standard of Judgment is his main theme in this Chapter. He recurs to it again and again. He shews how, on what principles, God deals with a righteous man, and with the wicked son of a righteous man; with a wicked man, and with the righteous son of a wicked man; with a bad man

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel xviii. 2; xxxiii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> See Sermon on "The Transfer of the Religious Unit" in Vol. II., page 1.

who repents of his sins, and with a good man who falls away from his righteousness. And not only does he shew us in each case what the rule of judgment is; he also affirms that in every case the rule is the same. Sometimes, indeed, he only gives us general phrases, as when he makes Jehovah declare, "I will judge you every one *according to his ways*," or when he simply declares the good man to be one who "walks in the statutes of life," or one who does "that which is lawful and right." But on three occasions at least (Verses 5-9, 10-13, 14-17),<sup>1</sup> of which my text is the first, he resolves these general phrases into particular terms, and tells us distinctly what those laws are obedience to which will render us righteous in the sight of God, and disobedience wicked.

According to him, the just or righteous man is one who loves the only wise and true God too well to waver in his allegiance to Him, too well to lift up his eyes to the popular idols of his time, or to join in the licentious orgies—feasts in the high places—which formed part of their worship. He is one who keeps himself pure from sins of the flesh, and rules its lusts instead of suffering them to rule him. He is fair in his dealings with his fellow-men, and temperate in urging any claim he has upon them. He is pitiful to the poor and needy, giving

<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that there is a subtle implication of the power of free will in opposition to the law of heredity in Verses 5-17. In the three cases here supposed the moral entail is broken twice. The first man of the series is righteous, his son wicked, his grandson righteous, each of the three following his own bent, not his hereditary bias.

bread ("his bread") to the hungry and clothing the naked with a garment. And finally, he is not a usurer, taking advantage of his neighbours' necessities to get them into his power or rob them of their estate,—a point on which, oddly as it sounds to us, much might be said did time permit, and on which Ruskin has said much which we should all do well to consider. Here, however, it will be enough if I ask you to remember what Oriental usury is like, how, as in India or Egypt, it may reduce a whole race into a cruel bondage fatal to all courage and hope, and oust them from the fields tilled by their fathers from time immemorial.

This, then, was the good man of Ezekiel (and he is not unlike Horace's *vir bonus*), the man who walked in the statutes of life and did that which is lawful and right, and who therefore could meet the Divine judgment without fear; while his bad man was, of course, a man who broke all these commandments, and committed "the abominations" forbidden by them. And if we translate the description of the ancient Prophet into modern terms, we may say that the just man is the man who is pious toward God, pure in heart, fair-minded and fair-dealing with his fellows, who is merciful to the poor and needy, and who will not enrich himself by injustice and greed; while the unjust man is one who is *not* pious, not pure, not pitiful, and who is only too ready to enrich himself at his neighbours' cost.

This being the Standard of Judgment, have you aught to allege against it? There is not, so far as I know, a single religious man in the world who, what-

ever his creed, would raise any other objection to it than that it does not go far enough, does not include so much as he would include if he had the framing of it. Nay, more, if we omit the first item on Ezekiel's list—piety toward God—I doubt whether there is a single reasonable man, whose opinion you would think of taking on any moral question, who would object to it, even though he should call himself an Agnostic or an Atheist. For, happily, even those who have renounced the Christian Faith, or have never accepted it, are hardly less earnest than the most sincere believer in insisting on the purity of family life, on fair and upright dealing between man and man, on compassion for the poor, the hungry, the naked, or on the baseness of the wealth acquired by greed and fraud, or by a crafty abuse of legal enactments. Impurity, injustice, unmercifulness, and greed, are not lovely in any man's eyes; they do not commend themselves to any man's conscience, even though he yield to them at times and serve them. No man dare stand up squarely for them, and defend them in public court. The most that even the worst of men can do is to disguise them in less revolting forms, and insinuate that the flesh is strong, and its lusts hard to tame, and that they must at times be allowed to have their way. And, even then, he must plead for the works of darkness *in the dark*; he dare not come out into the light lest his darkness should be reproved.

But if nothing can be alleged against this Standard of Judgment; if its religious demand is approved by all religious men, and its moral requirements are approved

by the universal conscience ; if Science rivals Scripture in the earnestness with which it pronounces these statutes to be "statutes of life,"—if nothing, I say, can be alleged against it, how much may be said in its favour ! How much *is* said by the mere fact that it commands universal consent, that it commends itself to every man's conscience, and secures the open approval of every wise and understanding heart ! To come short of a standard which our own reason and conscience approve is to stand self-condemned ; while to come short of a standard approved by the universal reason and conscience is to provoke their condemnation as well as our own.

This is much to say, but there is much more to say in favour of the Divine standard of judgment.

1. For, first of all, it is the same for every class and in every age. It has not one law for the rich and another for the poor, one for the higher and another for the lower classes ; nor even one for the elect and another for the non-elect. It presses one and the same obligations on all men, tries them all by one and the same tests. And hence it possesses that note of universality which is the distinction of every true law. For laws, if they are to be worthy of the name, must be uniform and inflexible. They can permit of no exceptions. And they must also make for health and righteousness. We could not approve, we surely cannot desire, that the Lord and Maker of the universe should frame laws to encourage feebleness, disease, or vice, and to impose penalties on health, strength, and goodness. He *must* demand piety of us and purity, integrity and charity, if even we our-



selves are to confess his law to be good, and therefore binding on every soul. And these things *are* good, good in all eyes as well as in ours. No race, whatever its religion and however poorly it may have conceived of God, has ever denied piety to be a duty, or maintained that we should withhold from Him that "dutiful affection" (*pietas*) which we owe to the Father of our spirits and the Giver of all good. No civilized race has pronounced it virtuous to violate the sanctions by which the honour and purity of family life are maintained, however ill they may have understood what is involved in its purity and honour. Unchastity, Injustice, Unfairness, Unmercifulness, and Greed, have never won the reverence of men, no, not even of those who have been addicted to them. And as for the leading faiths of the world, Moses enjoined on the fathers in the Wilderness all that Ezekiel demands of the captive Jews in Babylon. All that *he* includes in the laws and tests by which he affirms the fate of men will be determined was taught, in more penetrating and persuasive terms, by Christ Jesus our Lord. The Sermon on the Mount is simply a spiritual commentary on the Chapter before us, a divine expansion of its statutes and tests.

We may, therefore, say that the laws by which, according to Ezekiel, God's judgment of men will be controlled are *universal*, apply to every man, whatever his age or class, and whether he be Gentile or Jew, bond or free; and that they are *universally approved*, since, in substance, they have formed part of every religious faith which has taken root in the world, and command the

consent both of those who sin against them and of those who claim to be without any religious faith.

If, notwithstanding all this, any man affect to doubt the justice of this standard or to impugn the goodness of these statutes, he is easily put to the proof. Let another man enrich himself at *his* expense, deal unfairly by *him*, attempt the chastity of *his* wife or daughter, shew himself unfeeling to *his* distress, and the hot flame of resentment which burns up in his breast is *his* testimony to the justice of the Divine standard, to the goodness of the Divine code.

2. To some men this Standard will approve itself the more because it is for the most part ethical, and not theological. Conduct, they tell us, is three-fourths of human life ; while all theological beliefs rest on a somewhat uncertain foundation. The main question to be asked of any man is not, therefore, What does he believe? but, What does he do? How does he act? *We*, perhaps, may reply that men act on their beliefs, that their creed determines their conduct. We may urge that, before a man can be pure, he must at least believe in purity ; that before he can be just, he must believe in justice ; that only faith in pity will make him pitiful, only faith in charity will make him unselfish. We may, we do, plead that these virtues of conduct are most surely induced and maintained when they come to us clothed with the sanctions of faith in a pure, just, and loving God, whose will is expressed in these statutes of life, who rules men by these laws and will judge them by this standard. To us it is—or, at lowest, we admit that it should be—less

difficult to be pure because we believe that the Lord is holy, to be merciful because we believe in the Father of all mercies and the God of all grace, to be kind because we believe that He is kind.

And yet shall we not rejoice if any of our neighbours, though unable to believe in Him, destitute therefore of the strength, inspiration, and comfort which faith in Him would bestow, nevertheless believe in purity, in pity, in charity, as thoroughly as we do, teach these virtues as earnestly, and sometimes practise them with a sincerity which puts us to shame? Shall we not cherish a good hope for men who, though without the faith which we account to be our chief, if not only, advantage over them, are nevertheless found walking in these statutes, and whose life runs along as high a level as that to which, with all our advantage, we have attained? Shall we not suffer their virtue, their faith in it, their love of it, their practice of it, to remind us that our faith is of no value to us, that it is our shame and condemnation, save as it purifies and elevates the whole tenour of our life?

St. Paul said that the Law was added to the Promise because of unbelief. May not we say that the Gospel was added to the Law because of disobedience? that it is a divine expedient for inducing obedience to the law by which we live and by which we are to be judged? Did not Jesus Christ the Righteous come into the world, and take our nature, and bear our infirmities, and die for our sins, to make us righteous, that He might present us before God, without blemish or spot? The faith which does not produce those practical virtues which are the

very salt and strength of human life is dead ; and what can a dead faith profit us ? If, despite our belief in a pure and loving Father in heaven, and in a Saviour who came to quicken love and purity in our hearts, we sin against the plain laws of life and conduct, we are of all men the most sinful and the most hopeless.

3. To meet this Standard of Judgment is not impossible, however difficult it may be. To most of you it would, I suppose, be enough to argue that, because the standard is divine, it cannot be impossible to meet it, since God is just and will not demand of us more than He has enabled us to give. And yet, even while you assented to the argument as a mere question of logic, you might recall the amazing power of hereditary bias and of neighbourly influence, and doubt whether, to some men at least, obedience to the divine law might not be practically impossible. Look at the question a little more closely, then, and take up the items enumerated by Ezekiel one by one.

Whatever he may have received from his fathers, and whatever the force of the social customs of his time, would any man—would any one of you, venture to affirm that by the very make and constitution of your nature you are compelled to lend out money, as many an Oriental usurer does, at a 100 per cent. per annum ; or even that you are compelled to take advantage of a neighbour's necessities in order to enrich yourself by his ruin ? Knowing what even the poorest do for the poor, can you honestly plead that you *must* be so unpitiful as to leave the hungry to starve for lack of food or the

naked for lack of clothing? Can you assert that it is lawful and right for you to oppress and despoil your fellows, that you cannot help dealing unfairly by them? Can you, dare you, avow in any company of decent men that there is no harm in your defiling your neighbour's wife, or that, if there be harm, you must do it all the same? Can you even affirm, if you believe in God at all, that you cannot yield Him the dutiful affection which a child owes to his Father, a creature to his Creator? You know how these five questions must be answered. You know that the very statutes of the realm, and not only the commandments of God, condemn you if you commit four out of these five sins, since those statutes forbid usury and adultery, punish you for any unfair dealing that can be proved against you, and compel you, if only by a poor-rate, to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked. You know that your own hearts condemn you even more severely if you fall into any one of these sins, and that you are all doing far more to serve your neighbours and to help the needy than any of our State-laws demand. Here, in England at least, these statutes of life are written on our very hearts, and no sooner do we offend against them than the inward monitor and judge starts up to rebuke and punish us.

Obedience can hardly be impossible, then; for not only does God demand it of us; we demand it of ourselves, and of one another. And, as I have already hinted, if any one of our neighbours should commit any one of these forbidden "abominations" against *us*, we make very little allowance for his hereditary bias or the

evil social influences to which he has been exposed ; we hotly resent the wrong he has inflicted on us, and clamour for his punishment, if we cannot punish him ourselves. But though obedience be in some sense possible, and possible in a very high and noble sense to a truly pious man, who that knows himself at all or human life, and feels the real force of the law of heredity and the power of social customs, will venture to affirm that obedience is easy even to the best of men, or even that, to the average man, it is possible to render it complete ? If we take the *actions* particularized by Ezekiel, it is not hard to shew that no man, however bad he may be, is compelled to commit them ; for who that cares to resist evil need be an idolater, an adulterer, an oppressor, or an unmerciful and greedy slave to his own cravings and lusts ? But if we penetrate to the *principles* which lie beyond those actions, if we know how high the divine standard is and how broad the divine commandment, no man, however good he may be, but will confess that he finds it very hard, hard even to impossibility, to meet the demands they make upon him, to live up to his own conscience and incarnate his own ideal. Unwavering piety, absolute and unfailing purity, integrity, charity, in our intercourse with our fellows,—are these things easy, are they even attainable, to us even when we sincerely love God, and daily seek first his kingdom and righteousness ? O, it is not only the sins of our fathers or the sins of our neighbours, but our own sins, which stand in the way of obedience, however earnestly we may desire and strive to render it ! It is not only the customs of

society, but our own evil habits, which make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to keep our conduct square with the standard and the law which we inwardly approve.

And yet, what is to be done? The standard cannot be lowered : nay, we ourselves would not have it lowered. The law must be holy, just, and good, and must contemplate the general good, or we could not love it, should not care to obey it. And if the law must not be lowered, it only remains that our conduct be raised till it meet the demands of law. We must have these statutes of life engraved on our hearts and on our minds by the finger of God Himself. We must seek from the Father of our spirits grace to overcome all the evil tendencies we inherit from the fathers of our flesh. We must have in us the mind of Him who became our Neighbour that He might both save us from the depraving social influences to which we lie open, and recast Society itself in new and fairer forms. We must welcome the sweet and wholesome influences of the Spirit of God and his Christ, that we may be delivered from the bondage of our own sinful cravings and habits. Only by the Divine help can we meet the Divine standard and keep the Divine law.

How freely this help is offered us, how pathetically it is pressed upon us, I will try to shew in the next and final discourse of this brief series, when I shall have to speak to you, not of the Standard of Judgment, but of the Gospel of Mercy.

#### IV.

#### *THE CHARTER OF INDIVIDUALISM.*

##### IV.—THE GOSPEL OF MERCY.

“Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, that iniquity may not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions wherein ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : wherefore turn and live.”—EZEKIEL xviii. 30-32.

THE law of natural selection which, in the struggle for existence, secures the survival of the fittest, has its analogies in the social and the spiritual worlds. It is clearly announced in the proverb quoted and illustrated, if not sanctioned, by our Lord : “To him that hath it shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” It is not only in our physical and outward life that health, wealth, and vigour, shew a tendency to increase ; while all things seem to conspire together against their recovery when once they are lost. The same law is at work in the inward world, where the wise man is for ever adding to his wisdom, and even the good



man to his goodness ; while, on the other hand, you often come on some poor foolish wretch, fallen from his or her first estate, but with many secret longings after a purer, higher, richer life, who, meeting only with averted faces or suspicious glances, and hearing no accents but those of distrust and reproof, sinks despairingly into still lower depths of misery and disgrace. Here, too, the weakest go to the wall, the strong gather round the strong, and add their strength to his. The man who needs no friends may have as many as he will, and sometimes more ; while the man who has none can get none, precisely because he wants them so much. Let a "dull" man be delivered of never so fine a stroke of wit, and nobody laughs ; while a reputed "wit" can hardly open his lips, even to utter the merest platitude, in time to anticipate the "ready chorus." "This ever-changing world of circumstance, in changing," seems to "chime with the never-changing law," that "they shall take who have the power, and they shall keep who can : " and even "those who ought to be governed by a better law too often follow the lead of Circumstance, and help to kill off the weak and helpless that the strong may have more room to grow."

In the natural world the action of this law does not trouble us, because we can see that it contributes to the wealth and beauty of the world ; that there at least it is well that only the fittest should survive, since we are thus presented with the spectacle which entranced St. Paul, the spectacle of a whole creation moving onward and upward to "a glorious liberty," spinning *up* the

grooves of change unto a perfect end.<sup>1</sup> But when this law invades the domain of reason and conscience, it begins to trouble us very deeply ; for here it does not necessarily make for perfection : it is the strong, rather than the good, whom it rewards ; it is those who have, rather than those who deserve, on whom it bestows abundance. "Can that be just ?" we ask : "and if not, how can this law have come from God ?"

No, it is *not* just ; and yet the law *is* of God. For no law was ever accurately just in all its applications. Law, by itself, "makes nothing perfect ; it always hurts some who need help, and helps some who do not deserve it. For law must be uniform and inflexible ; it cannot adapt itself to differing conditions and abilities. Gravitation is a good law ; but it kills thousands of innocent people every year. Yet it would not do to have it less uniform and inflexible than it is," or we could not use it and rely upon it. The law which makes exercise in the open air a condition of health is a good law on the whole ; but it is often very hard on those who are unable to take exercise. The law which makes food dependent on toil is a good law ; but it often turns a cruel face on those who cannot work, or cannot get work to do. Good on the whole, good for the greater number, is the most that can be said for any law. And so much, though only so much, as this can be said for the law which brings strength to the strong, and weakness, disadvantage, death, to the weak. It *is* a good law, on the whole, that health and vigour should be encouraged and

<sup>1</sup> Romans viii. 19-21.

promoted, though it works much injury to the disabled and the infirm. We do not want an universe so ordered as to impose penalties on strength and to put a premium on feebleness. "The universe is built on the basis of universal health and righteousness: its laws are all adapted to that condition of things, and ought to be" so adapted. "If all men were good and wise and strong, then this law would only tend to increase the virtue, and the wisdom, and the vigour of all. It would be seen, then, that this law is a good law. But sin has entered to enfeeble and deprave many; and the result is that the law which ought to be," and was meant to be, "a savour of life unto life, becomes, to them at least, a savour of death unto death. The very forces that ought to build them up" pull them down; and more is given to those who have much, while those who have but little are often stripped even of the little they have.

Worse still, this law inflicts suffering and loss, not only on the sinful, but also on the weak, the unfortunate, the helpless, on those who are hindered, if not disabled for obedience, by hereditary infirmities and taints, or by defects of nurture and training and condition for which Society is far more responsible than they are: and thus many are brought under its ban by sins committed against them rather than by any sin which they have themselves committed. They are first wronged, and then punished for the wrong they have sustained. To these, at least, the law is no friend; it has nothing that it can do for them: for the one thing no law can do is to exempt and deliver those who have fallen under its sentence.

But what the law could not do, *Christ* did, when He came to call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance ; to heal, not the whole, but the sick ; to seek and save that which was lost : came, not to gather round Himself the wise, the mighty, and the noble, but to "choose the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame them that were wise, and weak things that he might put to shame the things which were strong, and base things, and the things that were despised, and the things that are not, that he might put to shame the things that *are*" and *have*. Law without Gospel is not complete ; it cannot touch the varied wants and conditions of such men as we are in such a world as this. The Gospel is the complement, the fulfilling, of the Law ; but the Gospel must transcend the Law that it may fulfil it. And hence *Christ* did not fall into that natural order of which our social laws are a reflexion. "*He* did not bestow his praise on the famous, nor his friendship on the popular, nor his benefactions on the rich," nor shew Himself strong upon the strongest side. By the very necessity of his nature He was drawn into a vital and tender sympathy with the obscure and outcast souls who, under every disadvantage, were striving to do that which was lawful and right, with those who loved much, if they had also sinned much. He was the Friend of publicans and sinners, the Helper of the poor, the Redeemer of the bound, the Comforter of the broken-hearted, the Saviour of the lost, and made it his mission to find, redeem, restore, those whom the law had condemned and the Church cast out.

This is the true function of that Gospel which comes to supply the defects of the Law. This is the meaning of the Incarnation ; the secret, and the power, of the Cross. The Law works injury, loss, death, on all who do evil, and on many, who, apart from any fault or choice of their own, "come into the world in a disabled condition through the sins of others," or breathe an atmosphere charged with impurity and death from the moment of their birth. Christ comes to take their part. "They are morally helpless, but He will help them. Sin has abounded in them ; but grace, if they will receive it, shall much more abound. He will give these defeated and prostrate souls another and a better chance. The law of the spirit of life that is in Him shall make them free of the law of sin and death," which is in them.

Thus far I have given you for the most part a summary and brief abstract of a Discourse recently published by one of the most able and independent thinkers of our time,<sup>1</sup> using his very words when I could, but adding, no doubt, something of my own, and emphasizing the points which throw a welcome light on the thoughts which have now for some time occupied our minds. And I have given you this abstract, not simply because it confirms much that you have already heard, but mainly because it sets forth, in the clearest way, that fatal defect of Law, and that necessity for blending Gospel with Law, on which I have now to insist.

<sup>1</sup> *The Law and the Gospel*, in THINGS NEW AND OLD, by Washington Gladden (London : J. Clarke & Co.)—a book which deserves a far larger public support than it has yet received, if only for its wise handling of "present" truths.

We often speak of Law and Gospel in terms which imply an antagonism between them ; whereas there is no antagonism, though there is much difference. There is a law in the Gospel, the highest and purest known to man ; for, as we saw in my last discourse, Christ takes up the very statutes of life—the piety, the purity, the integrity, the unselfishness—which Ezekiel declares to compose the code, or standard, by which every man is to be judged—takes them up and carries them inward, so making them more penetrating and commanding. And as there is a law in the Gospel, so also there was a gospel in the Law. There must have been, or no man could have lived under it, or have found in it satisfaction for his spiritual cravings and wants. By the works of the Law can no flesh living be justified ; and yet, even under the Law, men must be, and feel that they must be, just if they are to live. Ezekiel's just man is one who renders to God that "dutiful affection" which he owes to his Maker and Father and Lord ; he is one who is chaste, fair-dealing, merciful, generous, in his intercourse and traffic with his fellows. And there must be a sense in which obedience to this code, conformity to this standard, is possible to men, however difficult it may be. For these are laws which commend themselves to every man's conscience. With the exception of piety towards God, they are roughly enforced even by the statutes of the realm. Nor is it Law alone, but also we ourselves who demand obedience to them. We condemn ourselves if we violate them. We feel with Robertson of Brighton in the darkest hour of his long struggle with doubt and

unbelief, when all he could be sure of was that "it must be right to do right;"—we feel, with him, that "even if there be no God, and no future life, yet it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be true than to be false, better to be brave than to be a coward." There is not a man in the whole world who would impugn the authority, the binding obligation, of these laws; or, if there be, he is, as I have already said, easily brought to book. Let any man so violate them as to injure *him*, and the hot indignation which flames up within him against those who attempt to defile *his* wife, or to deal unfairly by *him*, or seek to enrich themselves at his expense, is the proof that he too recognizes these laws as holy and just and good.

Obedience must be possible, then, or why should the whole world agree in demanding it? And yet, who that knows himself will venture to deny that he has found it practically impossible? Who will dare to affirm that he has never at any time been unchaste, or unfair, or unmerciful, or selfish and greedy? Who has not sorrowfully to confess that in some one of these respects, if not in all, while approving the better course, he has nevertheless followed the worse?

But to offend in one point is, as St. James contends, to become guilty of all: for at whatever point you break through the hedge of Law, you *have* broken through it, and must take the penalty of your trespass. The hedge may have been thin just where you pushed through, or the temptation great; still you are on the wrong side of it, and can neither deny your transgression nor evade

your sentence. The Law concludes us all under sin, because it has convicted us all of sin. And, by and of itself, the Law can do nothing but condemn us. It has no remedial agency, no tenderness, no forgiveness. It never sends a man back to try again, or gives him another chance. Hence the imperative necessity for Gospel as well as Law. If there is any goodness in God, any kindness, any tenderness "such as fathers feel," He *must* have resources which lie beyond the bounds of law. And He must reveal these resources from the first, if men are to love Him, if they are to repent and live. His dispensations of righteousness must also be dispensations of grace.

He *has* revealed these resources of Mercy from the beginning. Adam's Gospel, Enoch's Gospel, Abraham's Gospel,<sup>1</sup> are phrases which can have no novelty for any member of this Congregation. Nor can any of you be unfamiliar with the thought that it was the main function of the Prophets, under the Law, to preserve and expand the gospel, or promise, delivered to the fathers of the race, the promise or gospel which the law, that came after, did not, and could not, disannul.<sup>2</sup> That Ezekiel should have a gospel to preach, as well as a law to deliver, is not strange therefore ; if he had had none, he would have been no prophet. We *expect* from him some revelation of the mercy of God, mercy for the sinful and the fallen, mercy for those who have not kept even the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Expositor* (Second Series), Vols. vi. and vii., for discourses on each of these topics.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians iii. 17.



code which he lays down or the laws which they themselves approve.

And in this very Chapter in which his main thesis is the personal responsibility of the individual man, his power to meet, and his obligation to meet, the divine standard by which he is to be judged, the Prophet, by his pathetic choice or use of words, gives us many hints of a Mercy transcending all the bounds of Law, on which I have not time to touch. But twice at least he gives us more than hints and glimpses, and places his Gospel before us in forms too clear and impressive for the dullest to overlook.

In Verses 21-23, for example, just when he has most severely affirmed that "the soul that sinneth it shall die," he represents Jehovah as relenting from the severity of mere law, and adding words instinct with a divine tenderness: "*But if the wicked man turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord, and not rather that he should turn and live?*" So, again, we have words still more tender and appealing in Verses 30-33: "*Repent and turn from all your transgressions, that iniquity may not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no*

pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : *wherefore turn and live.*" Can anything be more beautiful and gracious than the spirit which pervades these words, or more moving and pathetic than some of these phrases ? Might they not have fallen from the lips of Him who bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows ? Do they not breathe the very mind, the very *heart*, of Him who came to teach, and to grant, that "forgiveness of sins" in which we profess to believe ?

Nor was this Gospel of tenderness and compassion only a light which flashed through Ezekiel's words on a single occasion. On the contrary, they were of the very stuff and substance of his whole ministry. I must not detain you with many proofs. It will be enough if I quote only two passages from a later Chapter (xxxiii. 11, 14-16) which run almost exactly parallel with the two you have already heard : "As I live, saith the Lord God, *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*, but that the wicked turn from his way and live : *turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die*, O house of Israel ?" And, again : "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, *if he turn from his sin*, and do that which is lawful and right, . . . if he walk in the statutes of life committing no iniquity, *he shall surely live*, he shall not die. *None of his sins* that he hath committed *shall be remembered against him* ; he hath done that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live." The words are "of so sweet breath composed" that it is difficult to read them, or to listen to them, without being melted by their pleading tenderness and the tremulous earnestness of

their appeal. They need no explanation ; and I am afraid to comment on them lest any poor words of mine should mar their effect upon you.

*Do* they need no explanation? I can imagine a theologian insisting that they need a good deal, and rebuking any preacher who should take the "dangerous" course of leaving them in their unguarded simplicity. And, perhaps, there are some here who, because they are penitent for past offences and earnestly desire to live a better life, feel that, for all so tender and evangelical as they sound, the words of Ezekiel make a demand on them which they are not able to meet. For it is very notable that in all these gracious and pathetic appeals the onus of change is thrown on the sinner himself. It is assumed that he *can* turn from his evil ways, and cast away his transgressions from him ; that he *can* do that which is lawful and right ; that he *can* even make him a new heart and a new spirit, and so put himself beyond the reach of sin and death. And this is an assumption which many a man's experience does not warrant, a demand to which many feel they cannot respond, though they wish they could.

Not for the sake of the theologian, then, who is very well able to take care of himself, but for the sake of the penitent who are troubled and alarmed by so heavy a demand on their weakness, let me point out that the passages I have quoted do not comprehend the whole of Ezekiel's Gospel. If, like St. Paul, he bids men work out their own salvation, like the Apostle he also assures them that, before they can work at this task to any pur-

pose, God must work in and for them ; and that He is working in and for them if they are steadfastly striving to escape from the toils of iniquity into the liberty of obedience.

Basing himself on the teaching of his predecessor, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, whom we have just heard exhorting the repentant transgressor to cleanse himself from his transgressions, to make himself a new heart and a new spirit, and of himself to do that which is lawful and right, is profuse in such promises of a Divine help, a Divine redemption, and a Divine renewal, as may well carry strength and courage to the most feeble and despondent. Listen ; it is God who speaks through the Prophet, and speaks mere music to all who long for righteousness and life. “ *I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you ; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, I will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances to do them.*”<sup>1</sup> Listen again, and to the same gracious Voice : “ *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean ; from all your filthiness will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.*”<sup>2</sup>

When shall we learn, my brethren, that every demand God makes on us is simply a promise in disguise ; that He only *asks* in order that He may *give*, just as his Son, our Saviour, asked water from the Woman of Samaria that He might give her the living water of which whoso

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xi. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter xxxvi. 25-27.

drinks never thirsts more? Does He demand of you, O weak but penitent sinner, that *you* should cast away your transgressions, cleanse yourself from your defilements, and do that which is lawful and right? And are you troubled and alarmed that He should make a demand on you which, however reasonable, you have not strength to meet? Be comforted, be assured. What his demand on you really means is, "Make your demand on me, and *I* will cleanse you from your transgressions, and *cause* you to walk in my statutes." Does He bid you make yourself a new heart and a new spirit, that iniquity may not be your ruin? It is only because He intends, so soon as you listen to his Voice, to *give* you a new heart, and to put a new spirit, to create a *clean* heart and to renew a *right* spirit, within you, that He may save you from all your infirmities and sins. He arouses you by the severity of his demands simply that He may comfort and delight you with the gifts of his grace, and *make* you all that you can only crave and try to be, by writing his law on your heart and causing his Spirit to move and work within your spirit. And with this inward inscription and this animating Spirit to aid and inspire you, can you any longer plead, need you any longer fear, your natural inability to walk in the statutes of life?

Here then, in conclusion, we may see that the Gospel does not make void, but establishes, the Law. The universe is built, as I said at the outset, on the basis, on the assumption of universal health and righteousness,—a thought which one of our own poets has thrown into the words :

How strikingly the course of nature tells,  
By its light heed of human suffering,  
That it was fashion'd for a happier world !

And were all men healthy and righteous, the laws of the universe, physical and moral, would prove themselves to be veritable "statutes of life," because they would entail no suffering, but work together for our good, for the good and even for the happiness of all. It is sin which has induced weakness and disease. It is sin which has thrown the realm of nature out of its beneficent course and turned to our condemnation and punishment the laws which should have been friendly to us. And the Gospel comes in, not to defeat, but to fulfil, both the Law and the original purpose of the universe. It comes to fulfil them by taking away the sin which breeds infirmity and disease, by restoring us to moral soundness and health. Unlike Nature, unlike Law, it gives to those who have not, instead of taking from them what they have ; but it gives that they *may* have, and so may be reconciled both to Law and Nature. It puts no premium on weakness, but removes it, replaces it with strength. It forgives no sin which it does not take away ; but by taking away the sin of the world, by giving it a new heart and a new spirit, it fulfils the great prophecy of hope latent in the assumption on which the universe is built and the law is founded ; and teaches us to look for a time when both we, and all who listen to the Father's voice, shall be made every whit whole or hale ; when, because the Lord has given us the good tidings of great joy, Health shall spring up out of the earth and Righteousness shall look down from heaven.

V.

*"HE SENDETH SUN, HE SENDETH  
SHOWER."*

"For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."—MATTHEW v. 45.

DOES God, then, look with equal favour on the evil and the good? Is there no difference, does He make no difference, between the just and the unjust?

1. There is all the difference in the world between them, and in his treatment of them. For not only is the whole scheme of his Providence so framed as to render unto every man according to his works, evil to the evil, and good to the good; but even in the blessings they share in common, there remains an ineffaceable distinction between them. To the unjust the rain is rain, and it is nothing more; and the sunshine is sunshine, and nothing more: while to the just the rain is *God's* rain, and it is not only the sun, but "*his* sun," which shines upon them.

And who does not see what a world of difference that makes? To the one class, the rain is but water drawn up from the earth into the clouds, and dropped by the

clouds on the earth, which, if it fall at the right time and in the right place, will give fertility to their fields and wealth to their harvest ; and the sunshine is but the blended heat and light which spring from an endless series of fierce collisions at the centre of the solar system : while, to the other class, rain and sunshine are the immediate gifts of the Giver of all good, and bring with them not only fruitful seasons and "a waving wealth of corn," but messages, assurances, of love and goodwill from Him whose lovingkindness is better than life. To the one class, Nature is a mere round of forces and laws, with no ruling Mind, no loving Heart, behind them, and no care for individual welfare ; while, to the other, they are the affluent ministers of that great Lord and Lover of souls who, by his gifts, is ever seeking to make us more worthy of his gifts and more capable of receiving them in finer quality and richer abundance. Wordsworth's hawker is the type of the one class, of whom it is written that "he travelled here, he travelled there," through all the fairest prospects of the land,

But not the value of a hair  
Was head or heart the better.  
In vain, through every changeful year,  
Did Nature lead him as before ;  
A primrose by a river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him,  
And it was nothing more.

The type of the other class is the Hebrew Psalmist, who saw the very "glory" of God in the starry heavens, and heard his voice in "the soul of happy sound" which



is "spread through water, earth, and air," so that, for him at least, "day unto day uttered speech, and night unto night shewed forth knowledge."

If *we* are of the evil and the unjust, then, though God causes his sun to shine and sends his rain to fall upon us, these natural and common gifts lose their special virtue for us, because we do not recognize them as His ; the world around us has lost its highest and most spiritual beauty, its noblest and most inspiring poetry, its stimulus to love and gratitude and devotion : there is no "glory" in the heavens ; no song of praise rises from the earth ; no bow of hope and promise bends its fair broad arch across our sky ; no Providence shapes our ends for us : for the sun is not *God's* sun, nor the rain *God's* rain, nor are the chances and changes of this mortal life under his wise and kindly control. Whereas, on the other hand, if we are of the good and just, *i.e.*, if we are of those who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; if, for us, it is *God* who makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall, then the fruitful seasons bring us, not food alone, but joy and gladness ; the sun yields an illumination for our minds as well as light for our work ; and the rain cleanses and fertilizes our hearts as well as our fields ; all the blessings of this life minister a grace unto life eternal : and, in especial, they assure us of a Bounty that can never fail, of a Love which can never change, never die ; and so they redeem us from that yoke of care, that burden of anxiety and fear, from which there is no other deliverance. For if the sun is *God's* sun, and shines or clouds at his command ; and if the

rain is *his* rain, and falls only when and where Hé bids, then, because He is our Father and loves us, He will not suffer us to lack either sun or shower which it will be for our welfare to have.

This, indeed, is the great, practical, and ever-recurring lesson of The Sermon on the Mount. Because He knows how hard it is for creatures such as we are to *trust*, and so to trust as to throw off all care and fear—to cease from fretting about to-morrow as well as to-day, about others as well as ourselves, about the soul as well as the body, about eternity as well as time—the Lord Jesus is for ever seeking to inspire a trust in God like his own; a trust which in us, as in Him, will be able to meet poverty, loss, shame, death, without alarm. “Your heavenly Father careth for you,” he says, “careth for your very care, and would fain deliver you from it.” And again: “Your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of these things, and you have only to ask in order to receive them; nay, if only you will seek *first* better things than these, all these things shall be *added* to you,” *i.e.*, shall be “thrown into the bargain.” And, again: “If God so feed the birds, and so clothe the grass, shall He not much more feed and clothe you, O ye of little faith?” And again: “If you, even the worst of you, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to those that ask Him?”

*Thus* He seeks, not only to inspire trust, but to make us ashamed of our distrust; asking us, in effect, if we can possibly imagine God to be less kind, less bountiful,

less pitiful than we are ; whether He has not shewn and proved that He both can and will do far more for us than we can do for each other, even when we are impelled by the most ardent and unselfish affections.

Shame on us that, despite his patient teaching, we are so far from having learned this lesson of simple and absolute trust in God that it is often our last resource, the refuge to which we fly only when all else has failed us, when we have lost health, prosperity, confidence in ourselves and our neighbours, or when those on whom we have leaned are taken from us ! How often do we virtually exclaim, " Has it come to *that* ! " when we are told that none but God can help us !

Nevertheless, I am bold to say that even when we are driven to it as our last resource, we find it the best. For when we look out on danger from behind the shield of the Almighty, how safe we feel, though the danger should be very close and very great ! When once we can convince and persuade ourselves that all things are ours, because all are his ministers for our good, how rich we grow, even though men should still think us poor ! From this point of view, indeed, the whole face of Providence is changed. If it be *God* who rules the world and all the changes of time, and this God be *our* God, then the loss, the poverty, the pain, the bereavement we so much dreaded must be his gift to us ; it must express his will for us ; it must be charged with his love : it must be part of the discipline by which He is training us for his service and for his rest.

2. Viewed thus, all things another aspect wear—as we

may see for ourselves if we consider only the two instances suggested by the very language of my text. For sun and rain, sunshine and shower, are terms which have so completely taken on a figurative sense that no man can be sure, save for the connection in which we use them, whether we are referring to natural facts, or to the facts of moral experience. We *may* refer to the sun which ripens the corn and the rain which fertilizes the earth ; or we may refer to those happy prosperous conditions by which our inner life is gladdened, or to those adverse and sorrowful conditions by which it is saddened, impoverished, and depressed.

Of the innumerable forms which the Divine Providence assumes, then, let us take these two—prosperity and adversity—and consider the moral effects they produce on those who do, and on those who do not, accept them from the hand of God.

Take, first, the man who has no such trust. When *he* prospers in his way, and all, as he thinks, goes well with him, he naturally attributes his success to his own ability, industry, energy, to his own superior wisdom or virtue, or perhaps even to his good luck ; and so he grows conceited, self-confident, more pushing, adventurous, ambitious, more and more bent on taking his own way and pressing on to his own ends, more forgetful of God and less considerate of his neighbours ; even if he does not, as he often does, sink into a hard, boastful, purse-proud worldling, with no outlook beyond the present life, no care even for that which is best and highest in himself. And if he fall into adversity, such an one is only too apt

to cast the blame of his "undeserved" misery on God, on his neighbours, on any one but himself, to be soured in temper, suspicious, incredulous of the kindness or goodness of his fellows, incapable of learning any lesson from the chastisement which has come on him, of finding any gift, any discipline, any benediction in it, any token of the Divine care and love.

But the man who really trusts in God, who sincerely believes that it is God who sends sunshine and shower, and that the showers come to make the sunshine more sweet and fruitful—in him, prosperity, since it is God's gift and not simply his own achievement, breeds no self-conceit, no self-confidence, but modesty and gratitude. Instead of rendering him hard, selfish, worldly, it binds him closer to his Father in heaven, and makes him more careful to use all he has received for the good ends for which it was bestowed. Instead of alienating him from his fellows, by flattering an evil conceit of his superiority to them, it incites him to deal as generously and kindly with them as God has dealt with him. And if it should please God to try him with adversity, to strip him of goods or position, health or friends, he still remembers that this too is the work of God, and therefore must be the work of Love. And hence, though he cannot but feel his loss, and indeed is intended to feel it, he tries to feel it as God would have him feel it. As he never trusted in riches, nor boasted of them, he is not humiliated or soured by losing them. Because he knows that men learn in suffering what they teach in song, he bends himself to learn the lesson which God has set him, and

does not doubt that a day will come on which he will be able to set it to a growing music.

In a word, trust in God, when it is sincere and strong, is the antidote of all care, all fear, all grief, simply because it recognizes the hand of a Father in them all, and the discipline of his Fatherly love. And I myself have seen men and women who were supported by it—yes, and made strong and glad by it, in a penury that bordered on starvation, in the keenest torments of pain, and in a death clouded by the prospect of hardship and want to those they loved and left behind them. And that is why I want this trust for myself, and for you.

We ought to strive for and cherish it, not for ourselves alone, but also for the world at large. And we *may* cherish it. For when our Lord assures us that it is our Father in heaven who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the unjust as well as the just, his ultimate meaning cannot surely be less than this,—that the Fatherly Hands which rule and control all the events of Time will send sunshine and shower on all his children as may be most convenient for them ; that He will so regulate the whole discipline of human life as that, at last, evil may be overcome of good, and after this April, this Spring, of time, we may all pass into the full eternal Summer of his love. How, else, can He be the Father of lights, in whom is no darkness at all ; the Father who, not being evil, knows how to give good gifts to all his children, however evil and imperfect they may be ?

3. But, finally, *for what reason* does our Lord insist

on the universal and untiring bounty of God, his Father and ours? *Why* does He affirm that God makes his sun to shine, though not to shine alike, on the evil and on the good, and his rain to fall on the unjust as well as the just?

It is, as the context shews, *because He would provoke us to a like love and bounty*. God does it, He says, and therefore we are to do it too, if we would shew ourselves to be the sons of our Father who is in heaven. Because God has been so good to us, because He is so good to all, we are to let our light shine and our rain fall on those who have been as unjust to us as we have been to Him, on those who have wronged us as we have wronged Him. "Love your enemies," He says, "and pray for them that persecute you ; *for* your Father in heaven has set you the example in that his sun shines on evil and good, and his rain descends on righteous and unrighteous."

Now that is a very hard commandment ; it is an almost impossible commandment, save to those who trust in a Love and Mercy beyond their own, and draw their inspiration and strength from that high Source. Indeed all the distinctively Christian commandments are hard to flesh and blood ; and, however willing the spirit may be, the flesh in us is so weak that we render them but a halting and imperfect obedience. To forgive those who have really and seriously wronged us, to love those who still hate us, to pray for those who pursue us with injury and insult—which of us does that? To those who consider what they say there is one simply terrible petition in the Lord's Prayer, frequently and

lightly as we repeat it : for if God is only to forgive our trespasses against Him *as* we forgive them that trespass against us, which of us can account himself pardoned and absolved ? And, in like manner, when our Lord declares that then only can we be sure that we are the sons of our Father who is in heaven when we love them that hate and injure us—which of us, who knows himself, dare assume himself to be a child of God ?

There ought to be some reason why such difficult and almost impossible duties are required of us ; and the reason ought to be a very strong and cogent one.

There *is* such a reason, and it is strong enough even for the work it has to do. For these commandments are not arbitrary, but reasonable, inevitable. Our very life, our very peace, depends on our obedience to them. *For we cannot believe that God has forgiven us, with a stedfast faith, until we have forgiven our neighbours ; and we cannot be sure of, we cannot trust and rest in, the love of God while we cherish hatred and resentment for those who have wronged us.* Do what he will, profess what he may, an unforgiving man *cannot* stedfastly believe in forgiveness, an unloving man cannot believe in love, any more than a foolish man can believe in wisdom, or an impure man in purity. To close our hearts against any of our neighbours is, at least by that door, to shut out God ; to steel our hearts against even our worst enemy is to harden them against God, to whom nothing is so hateful as hatred.

Do your best, dwell on the infinite mercy and compassion of God, on the promises of his grace, on the



sacrifice of his Son ; try in all other respects to live a kindly and a godly life : and still, if there is any man whom you hate, any man whom you cannot or will not forgive, by that avenue distrust and fear are sure to enter in ; your rest is sure to be broken. You may argue that God is infinitely better than you are, more able to love, more willing to forgive ; but you cannot deny that He wants *you* to be good ; you cannot doubt that, if He loves you, it is that He may love you into a goodness like his own. And when you stand in his presence asking for, or even rejoicing in, his love for you, and praying for grace to respond to it, if you suddenly remember that there is even one man whom you do not love, an enemy whom you have not forgiven and have determined never to forgive, that little cloud will darken all your sky, that little rift will let out all the music of your joy and praise. Only those who forgive can be sure of forgiveness ; only those who love can be sure of love. And much of the unbelief which mingles with and disturbs our faith, most of our doubts about God's attitude toward us, have, I suspect, no other origin and cause than this,—that we have been cherishing some mood or temper of the soul so opposed to the love and grace of God as to make his grace and love questionable, if not incredible to us.

All this, I suppose, and much more, is included in the motive with which our Lord supplies us as He closes his brief homily on Love and Forgiveness : “Ye, therefore, shall be *perfect, even as your heavenly Father* is perfect.” But in what a gracious and alluring form He puts it all ;

not dwelling on the necessity of forgiving if we would know ourselves forgiven, and of loving if we would be sure of love ; but telling us that nothing short of our perfection will content Him : that because God makes his sun of love and bounty to shine upon the evil as well as the good, we must let the light of our love shine even into the most estranged and darkened heart ; that because He sends the cleansing rain of his forgiveness on the unjust, in order that He may make them just, therefore we must forgive those who have trespassed against us.

Can you blame or reproach Him for having such high thoughts of you, such high aims for you ? If nothing short of a Divine perfection will content Him for you, will you yourselves be content with less ? Rather, pray and beseech Him so to manifest the Father's forgiving love to you, and in you, that you may frankly forgive, forgive from the heart all who have wronged you, and love even those who hate and have spitefully used you. As we close our meditation, then, let us all unite in the prayer—it is based on one of Sir Philip Sidney's :

“We yield ourselves unto thy will, O Lord our Father, because Thou art our Father, and joyfully embrace whatever task Thou shalt set us to do, whatever sorrow Thou wilt have us to bear. Only this much let us crave of Thee, that Thou wilt suffer some beam of thy Majesty so to shine into our hearts that, under all the toils, sorrows, and changes of Time, we may confidently depend on Thee, and hopefully look forward to a time when Time shall be no more : through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.”

## VI.

### *THE LAST GOSPEL OF SCIENCE.*

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good : and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”—MICAH vi. 8.

MANY of you must have read with keen interest a recent discussion in the *Nineteenth Century* magazine, in which Dr. Reville, Mr. Gladstone, Prof. Huxley, and Max Müller, compare the Biblical and the scientific accounts of the creation of the world, and either attempt to reconcile them or declare any sincere reconciliation impossible. In this controversy Prof. Huxley intervened simply “in the interests of justice,” and to let the public know “what it is that natural science really has to say” on this theme, at least in “the best belief of one who has been a diligent student of natural science for the last forty years.” Happily, however, he did not confine himself within the prescribed limits ; but, besides telling us what science has to say, whether on the creation of the world or the Biblical account of the creation, he was moved to utter some thoughts on a topic much more momentous, if only

because of its far more practical bearing on human thought and conduct. In short, while contending against what he holds to be grave theological prepossessions, he was moved to tell us what, in his judgment, the true and only gospel is, the gospel which really answers to and meets our needs; and to pronounce, with a touch of Pauline fervour, his anathema on any who should either add to or take away from his gospel.

Now Prof. Huxley is a man so able, so honest, and of so learned a spirit, that I suppose almost any scientific Congress would admit him to be as fair and adequate a representative of Science as they could elect. And as I think you will find it very instructive to consider what the last gospel recognized and approved by Science is, let me ask your close and serious attention to the words which I am about to quote (*Nineteenth Century*, December, 1885, page 160).

"In the eighth century B.C., in the heart of a world of idolatrous polytheists, the Hebrew prophets put forth a conception of religion which appears to me as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Pheidias or the science of Aristotle.

*"And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*

"If any so-called religion takes away from this great saying of Micah, I think it wantonly mutilates, while, if it adds thereto, I think it obscures, the perfect ideal of religion."

To this he adds, in a subsequent paragraph: "The

antagonism of science is not to religion, but to the heathen survivals and the bad philosophy under which religion herself is often well-nigh crushed. And, for my part, I trust that this antagonism will never cease ; but that, to the end of time, true science will continue to fulfil one of her most beneficent functions, that of relieving men from the burden of false science which is imposed on them in the name of religion."

Now the two vital points in this remarkable utterance are, first, the admission of Science, made by the mouth of one of her most competent and distinguished representatives, that my text presents *the perfect ideal of religion* ; and, secondly, the assertion that the true function of Science is not to set herself in antagonism to Religion, but to deliver her from the heathen survivals, the bad philosophy, and the science falsely so called, which have obscured her lustre and impaired her vigour. For had all men of Science proclaimed with one voice this to be their true function, no intelligent member of the Church could ever have assumed Science to be unfriendly to religion ; while had they always confessed "the great saying of Micah" to be a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, it surely would have been impossible for any devout and open-minded man to have ranked them among the enemies of the Christian Faith, however earnestly he might contend that the saying which Prof. Huxley holds to be merely "an inspiration of genius" was really "given by inspiration of God." The mere fact that this confession comes on us as a most welcome surprise indicates, I think, that the quarrel, or mis-

understanding, between the camp of Science and the Christian camp has not been wholly of our making.

If we were conversing with Prof. Huxley, we might venture to remind him that what he calls "the great saying of Micah" is held, by many learned critics, and critics with whom I think he would be very likely to agree were he a student of Scripture, to be a quotation from the lips of Balaam, the substance of his answer to the question of Balak recorded in the two verses which precede it; that, therefore, the perfect ideal of religion which he so profoundly admires was, probably, more nearly *eighteen* than eight centuries old when Christ was born: and to ask him whether, since he can either shew himself unaware of so well known a critical fact, or capable of falling into a blunder of a thousand years, when he ventures on a question of religious literature, he need be so severe as he sometimes is on religious writers who fall into similar blunders, or betray a similar ignorance, when they venture to speak on points of science.

But Prof. Huxley is beyond the reach of our voices; and it will be wise of us to confine our attention henceforth to the large practical results of the confession and assertion which I have just quoted from him, and to their bearing on our own belief and conduct. And who that loves God and his neighbour will not greet his words with joy and thankfulness? Not always has Science spoken thus, nor by the mouth of all her children. Even if they do not profess to find "the promise and potency of all things" in matter, many of those who affect to be most deeply moved by the scientific spirit of the age

constantly assume that the Christian Faith has grown to be altogether incredible to every intelligent and cultivated mind. In vain do we plead that, for the present at least, the large majority of those who are most eminent in almost every province of human thought and action are true to the Faith of their fathers. If the argument is not ignored, the fact is disputed. The eminent men of culture who cleave to the Christian Faith, we are told, have not mastered the discoveries of modern science; or their motives are impugned, and they are charged with professional bias if, besides being men of Science, they are believers in Christ or ministers of his Church. But not even those who are most convinced of the incompatibility of faith with modern thought and culture can take this tone about Prof. Huxley. They can neither question his claim to speak in the name of Science, nor doubt his honesty. He is a recognized authority with them, and one of the highest. And now he avows that Science is not antagonistic to religion, confesses that in "the great saying of Micah" we have an ideal of religion so perfect that Science has nothing to allege against it; and even condemns all who would either mutilate or obscure it.

Now that is a very grave, and may be a very momentous, admission for many who, while reluctant to give up the religious faith in which they were bred, have nevertheless been perplexed and put in doubt by the tone of absolute authority with which certain modern teachers have declared the Christian religion to be an exploded superstition which cannot long retain its hold on any but

ignorant and credulous minds. For these teachers are here denounced by an authority higher than their own. And though most of *us*, I hope, cherish a faith which does not rest on any man's wisdom or authority, however eminent he may be ; though *we* may believe because we have heard Christ for ourselves, because we have verified his sayings in our own experience, and know Him to be the Saviour of the world ; though, for us, his authority may therefore stand infinitely higher than that of any other teacher sent by God : yet even we may well be glad, for the sake of those whose faith is still wavering and unsettled, to find Huxley also among the prophets, and proclaiming, with an authority which even the most sceptical will respect, that in the writings of the Hebrew Seers he has discovered an ideal of religion so fair and complete that even Science herself may well sit at their feet and learn of them.

For consider what this "perfect ideal" is, and what it involves. The Prophet, whether Micah or Balaam, sums up the whole duty of man in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Prof. Huxley declares that, in religion, he wants nothing more than this, and can be content with nothing less. Can we also, we of the Church, accept this summary as setting forth the very substance of religion? Surely we may, if at least we are allowed to take the words of Micah *in the sense in which he used them*.

Taken simply by themselves, indeed, and apart from their prophetic use, they postulate the existence of God, and of a God whose character is the standard and rule



of the justice and mercy we are bound to shew ; a God, therefore, to whom we owe a constant obedience, with whom we are to "walk" in a living sympathy and communion, and toward whom our proper attitude is one of profound humility and devotion. And to those among us whose hearts have been vexed with the perpetual negations and denials put forward in the name of modern Science or modern Thought, and, above all, with the confident assertion that there is no God, or that, if there be, we can never know anything about Him or his will, if He has a will,—even *this* will seem a surprising concession and relief.

But Prof. Huxley is too honest a thinker to palter with words in a double sense, to quote words from a Hebrew prophet who used them to convey one set of ideas, while he himself uses them to convey another. Hence we are bound to assume that he finds, and means us to find, in the Prophet's words the very significance which Micah intended them to carry. And what did a Hebrew prophet mean by a "just" man, if not a man who walked in all the commandments of the Hebrew law blameless ; *i.e.* a man who accepted the revelation of the Divine Character and Will made to his fathers, and set Himself to do right, or to be righteous, after the Divine standard and pattern? And whence did this just man learn that justice must be tempered with mercy, that you cannot do justice to your fellows till you know them, and cannot know them till you love them, but from the selfsame Law, which bade him love his neighbour as himself, as well as love the Lord his God with

all his heart and soul and strength? What was his standard of compassion and charity but the charity of God, the compassion which had forgiven his faults and sins, and therefore bound him to forgive the sins and faults of his fellows? What did *he* mean by God? Not an impersonal stream of tendency, not an unknown and unknowable Power which made for righteousness; but a living Lord and Ruler of men, who ordered the good man's steps and listened to his prayers, a wise and tender Father who pursued him with lovingkindness and tender mercy, a gracious Saviour who redeemed him from his bondage to sin and weakness; and yet a Lord and Father whose love and mercy were so high above the reach of his thoughts as to be for ever shrouded in mystery, so that he could not but walk humbly with Him, his heart full of wonder and self-abasement at a Wisdom, a Purity, a Kindness, which transcended all understanding.

I do not wish to push my argument too far; and therefore I do not affirm that all this was present to Prof. Huxley's mind when he quoted Micah's saying; but I do fearlessly assert that Micah meant all this when he wrote or quoted it: for Micah was a prophet, not a lawgiver or a priest; and it was the prophets of Israel who, as you have often heard, preserved the more ethical and spiritual elements of the Hebrew religion; it was the prophets who taught that gospel which, preached aforetime to Abraham, the Law could not disannul, though its full grace and truth came only with Christ. But even taking the words at something less than their original

value, assuming them to mean only what a modern man of science would use them to mean, have you considered how much they involve ; how difficult it is to apply them to the compl  x, and often conflicting, claims of human life : and how much more difficult it is to render them a living and constant obedience ?

For the sake of brevity let us omit the most pregnant and difficult clause of this great Saying, that which bids us walk humbly with God, and glance only at the more plain and obvious injunctions which bid us deal justly with our fellows and shew them mercy. Let us assume, that you *want* to do justice to men : is it always easy to ascertain what justice demands ? Is there no personal bias, are there no selfish, or family, or class interests, to pervert your view ? Even if you have conquered these, even if the altruistic have gained the victory over the selfish instincts in you—an immense assumption—is it not still difficult to discover what justice all round requires of you ? justice to those above as well as to those below you ; justice to your rivals and opponents as well as to your friends and colleagues ; justice to all the relations in which you stand, and not only to some of them ? And even if you *want* to shew mercy, *i.e.* a compassionate kindness to your neighbours, are you always, or easily, sure what course you ought to take ? A landlord, for example, may be both willing and able to reduce the rent of tenants who ask for an abatement ; but, if he yield to his kindly impulse, may he not prove unkind to the poorer landlords in his vicinity who are unable to make a similar reduction ? A master may be tempted

to raise the wages of his work-people ; but, even if it would be kind to *them* to do so—which is not always certain—he may not only injure other employers who are unable to follow his example, but may also enter on a course which will incapacitate him for meeting other demands upon him, and so add to the cost of production as to spoil the market. *You* may be moved to relieve the distress you see and which clamours for relief ; but can you always do that without injuring even those whom you help, or without putting it out of your power to help that nobler kind of poverty which is too shy or too proud to parade itself ? How any man who knows what human life is like can assume that to do justice and to shew mercy is an easy task, if only we want to do it, so easy that we can afford to dispense with any teaching beyond that of this bare injunction, is a mystery quite as unfathomable as any of the so-called “mysteries of grace.”

And how any man who has had a large experience of men can assume that this “perfect ideal of religion” needs only to be seen in order to be loved and adopted, that men can lightly be induced to do justly and love mercy, or that they can find in themselves the strength for pursuing and attaining it, is a profounder mystery still. Strength to do that which we know to be right is precisely that of which, sooner or later, we all feel our lack and our need. How can *we* trust in any good resolutions we may frame, when all the ground behind us is strewn with broken resolutions ? To what end shall we renew, with what heart can we renew, our

endeavours after goodness, when all our best endeavours have failed, have left us the poor, irresolute, imperfect creatures that we are, tied and bound by the chain of our sins, our conscience dulled, our memory polluted, the animal instincts we have too often indulged rising in ever new insurrection against the will to do good, our best aspirations, our most ardent efforts, checked or foiled by the evil habits we have formed?

The fatal defect of all the ethical schemes put forward by those who reject revealed religion and yet are fain to find some substitute for it is, that they take no account, or no sufficient account, of the fact and power of Sin—a fact which nevertheless it is not difficult to verify, a power of which no man who knows himself can be unconscious. Go to the average man, struggling from darkness toward the light, straining to recover himself from many a conscious lapse from virtue, and to plant himself on ground which shall not be always giving way beneath his feet; carry to him this fair and “perfect ideal of religion;” tell him that he has only to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God, and will you carry him any real and solid aid? will you not, rather, be to him as one who mocks his deepest need? It is these very things which he has failed to do, and knows that he has failed to do even when his will to do them was best, and despairs of ever being able to do. But tell him also that God is a living Father and Friend, that He is the Helper and Saviour of all who trust in Him, that He has proved his fatherly and redeeming love once for all by assuming our burdens, bearing our

infirmities, and taking away our sins ; tell him that He is still with us, that his ear is open to our cry, his arm stretched out for our salvation, that He can and will make his strength perfect in our weakness, that it is precisely the weak and sinful, those who have fallen and gone astray, whom He comes to seek and save ; in a word, add the Gospel of Christ to the Gospel of Micah, and you speak to the man's very heart ; you offer him just what he knows he lacks and wants. And if you can persuade him that what you say is true, he will take new hope and courage ; virtue will no longer seem impossible to him, however difficult it may be : you have opened a new spring of aspiration and endeavour within him : he becomes a new man, a saved man, with a strength beyond his own on which to lean.

But in thus adding the Gospel of Christ to the Gospel contained in the great saying of Micah, have you either mutilated or obscured that perfect ideal of religion which Prof. Huxley finds in this Saying ? So far from either obscuring or mutilating it, you have simply made it a possible and inviting ideal, an ideal which every man, however weak and imperfect he is, may gradually draw down into and realize in his daily life. You have simply supplied men with the motives for accepting and for working towards it, motives apart from which it must for ever stand high above them as the heavens above the earth. You have simply shewn them reasons and given them power for that humble walk with God which will enable them to do justice, and to love mercy well enough to shew mercy to their neighbours. Almost every honest

man would admit, I suppose, that he *ought* to do that which is just, and to have compassion on those who have wronged or offended him. But unless he has been taught to walk with God, in a vital and growing fellowship, and unless this God with whom he walks is a living and loving Father in whom he may find the very Source and Pattern of all righteousness and of all compassion, with whom therefore he *must* walk humbly if he walk at all, how shall he do that which he himself admits to be right and good? Has he not tried often enough without God's help and failed, failed so constantly and so miserably as to have no heart for further effort or hope?

We who believe in Christ and in God, then, do not question the perfectness of the ideal of religion which Science has at last discovered in the great saying of Micah; we admit that to do justly, to shew mercy, and to walk humbly with God, is the whole duty of man. But we say that Micah's words must be taken in Micah's sense; and we contend that, to men weakened and defiled by sin, only faith in the God whom Christ first fully revealed or declared, only faith in that loving Father and mighty Redeemer to whom all the Hebrew prophets gave witness, will enable them to do their duty, and to embody this perfect ideal in their lives.

And you, my brethren, will doubtless endorse my argument; you too are prepared to contend that faith, faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the only motive-power capable of lifting the lives of men into accord with this fair ideal. And, therefore, I will only ask you, in conclusion, to remember that, since you

believe in this God, since you believe that only faith in Him will make men just and merciful in their daily lives, every unjust act and every unmerciful act into which you fall is not only your own condemnation, but also weakens the power of your testimony to the truths you believe on your neighbours' minds and hearts. Were *we* to incarnate this fair ideal, were the Church the very home of justice and charity and humility, the world would soon be won by our good conversation in Christ Jesus to a faith in Him like our own. It is mainly because we, who profess to walk by faith, are so wanting in justice, in mercy, in lowliness of mind, that we find it so hard to persuade them that are without that this faith is at once an indispensable and a sufficient help to a life of virtue and piety.



## VII.

### *AY AND NAY TOO, NOT GOOD DIVINITY.*

"As God is true, our word toward you was not Yea and Nay."—  
2 CORINTHIANS i. 18.

ABOUT fifty years after the birth of Christ, the Gospel was introduced into Corinth by the Apostle Paul. Some five years later, he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians. During the five intervening years, local influences, both speculative and moral, had developed themselves within the bosom of the Church, corrupting both its creed and its conduct. Greek philosophies, Oriental mysticisms and asceticisms, Hebrew traditions and bigotries, Corinthian vices, were striving confusedly together, and making a common assault on the truth and grace of Christ. On this strife of passion and prejudice St. Paul tried the effect of argument and expostulation. In his first Epistle he re-stated the main truths of the Gospel he had preached among them, and indicated the spiritual unity which might underlie the freest exercise of thought and the widest differences of opinion, if only charity were allowed full scope. His Epistle was necessarily as severe as it was tender; for

he had to deal with one of those cases in which truth is severity, in which tenderness can only heal, or alleviate, the wounds which truth is compelled to make. The result of his intervention was doubtful, as, in such cases, it always is. You cannot touch the souls of men, you cannot criticize the creed and code which they have framed for themselves, and still less can you censure the prejudices and bigotries which corrupt their creed, without running grave risk of exciting the venomous passions which lurk in an irritated self-love. No man better understood the rights of free thought or the irritability of self-love, than the Apostle. Hence he waited with tremulous anxiety, with many misgivings and fears, for tidings of the reception his Letter had met.

At last Titus brings him the intelligence for which he had waited. On the whole, it was of a nature to allay his solicitude. The larger and better part of the Church had been moved to shame and godly contrition. They had renounced the heresies, and the immoralities, which had given him so much concern. His anxiety before the good news came, and his relief when it arrived, are pathetically expressed in this Second Epistle to the Corinthians. "Our flesh had no rest. We were troubled on every side. Without were fightings; within, fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforteth them that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and by the consolation wherewith he had been comforted of you, when he told us of your longing for me, your mourning, your fervent mind. For if I grieved you by my letter, I do not repent, though indeed I did

repent ; for I perceive that this letter grieved you but for a season. And this very sorrow of yours, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what longing, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge. In all respects, ye shewed yourselves to be clear in this matter : and on this account we were comforted." As you read the words, you can feel St. Paul's heart throbbing under them, and are constrained to sympathize with the strange tumult of passionate emotion which was sweeping through his heart when he wrote them.

The Apostle's comfort and joy, however, were not pure and unmixed. Those who had fostered dissension and strife in the Church, the leaders of its several factions, were not humbled, but embittered, by his rebuke. The godly sorrow, the humble submission, of their brethren galled these prating lovers of pre-eminence. Their importance was gone—the letter of the absent apostle outweighing their living presence and word. Cut to the quick, they set themselves to arrest this new movement toward trust and unity. And as the most likely means to that end they set themselves to undermine the Apostle's authority, the authority which he derived simply from an ampler knowledge of the truth and a more perfect devotion to the service of Christ. With him out of the way, their course would be clear, and they would come to be of some importance again. And so they began to wrest his words, to disparage his character, and sow suspicions of his honesty, his veracity, his disinterestedness, his courage. "No doubt," they

said, "Paul can write very strong and eloquent letters; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible—as he himself very well knows. Because he knows it, he is afraid to trust himself among you, to meet *us* face to face who can at least talk as well as he. He is always promising or threatening to come; but he never comes. He is afraid to come. He is cowardly, irresolute, and insincere. How can we trust the word of one who does not know his own mind? who is for ever vacillating between Yea and Nay? who when he says Yes doesn't mean Yes, and when he says No doesn't mean No?"

This was one of the charges they alleged against the Apostle: and he meets it, first, with peremptory denial, and then with reasoned argument. First he says, or, rather, swears: "As God is true, our word toward you was not Yea and Nay." And, then, he gives the true reason for his apparent vacillation: "Moreover, I call God for a witness upon my soul that it was *to spare you* I came not as yet to Corinth: for I determined that I would not come again *to bring grief*: and for that cause I did not come, but wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears."

Even his peremptory denial of this false and damaging charge, however, is something more than a mere denial, clenched with a solemn oath. St. Paul was one of those rare men whose reason penetrates and controls their passions as the sun and moon rule the waves and tides of the sea. "God is true, true to his word," he argues, "and therefore I am true. The Son of God," he continues

in the next Verse, "is true, *his* word is not Yea and Nay: and therefore I am true, my word to you cannot be first Yea and then Nay. *Their* words do not shew a fluctuating and irresolute will; nor do mine. When I said I would come and see you, it was my love for you which prompted me to come, and the hope that I might bring you joy. If I did not come, or did not come so soon as I intended and you expected, that was not because of any change in *me*, but because *you* had changed. It was still my love for you which held me back: I deferred my coming that I might not bring you grief instead of joy."

But, here, as many as read or listen with attention will be sure to object: that looks like logic indeed: but surely it is a very strange kind of logic. St. Paul's words sound very strong; but do they signify much? Taken simply as an argument—unless indeed there be some suppressed premiss, some implied and connecting truth—they prove nothing. One man is not true simply because another man is true. Much less is any man true because the perfect God is true. Put the Apostle's argument into an Apostate's mouth, and where is the logic then? Is *he* true because God is true? If St. Paul is true because God is true, it is not simply as a man, or as a Jew, or as a Christian, or even as an Apostle; for some in each one of these categories have been notoriously untrue.

What, then, *is* the suppressed premiss of this imperfect syllogism, the implied truth which gives soundness and force to the Apostle's argument? I take it to be this: *The life of God is in Paul, and manifests itself in him as it did in God's Son.* Otherwise the faithfulness of God

is no guarantee of St. Paul's truthfulness any more than it is for yours or mine. But if he has become in very deed "a partaker of the divine nature," and if, in the narrow conditions of humanity, that Nature retains the same divine qualities which it possesses in the infinite being of God, then indeed the inference will hold good, that as God is true, Paul must be true.

*This*, I suppose, was the truth which the Apostle assumed here—that he was now of one nature, one mind, one heart, one will, with God and the Son of God. The thought was so familiar to him, as we may see in all his writings, that he does not always stop to express it. He assumes his readers to know that, by the grace of God, he too is a son of God, that for him to live is for Christ to live in him.

And yet what a wonderful, what a well-nigh incredible truth it is which he so calmly assumes! Will the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity in very deed dwell with men on the earth, and not only dwell *with*, but dwell *in* them? Is it true that, not Paul alone, but every man who believes in Christ, may become a temple, a sanctuary, a shrine for that Divine Spirit who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Between heaven and earth, between the human and the Divine, between the Creator and his creatures, there is an interval so vast that we cannot easily accept the fact which to St. Paul's mind was so familiar as to need no formal expression. His argument, unless this wonderful truth of the indwelling God were assumed, unless this connecting link were instinctively supplied by the Corinthians, would have been a mere

absurdity. Yet he gives it no formal utterance, sure that it needs none.

Alas, it is otherwise with us! We admit that God is above and around us. We see Him in his works, trace Him in his ways. But to have God within us; to have Him attaching Himself to the divinely-related element which He has placed within us, incarnating Himself in that hidden and better man of the heart which He has quickened in us, ruling our whole being, shedding his light into the darkness of our minds, bringing order into the tumult of passionate and conflicting emotions by which our hearts are shaken,—this is well-nigh too marvellous to be believed, too awful to be desired. Yet it was for this very end that “the Son of God, Jesus Christ,” took on Him the form of man, and wears it still. It is his humanity which bridges over the vast interval between the Creator and his creatures. The Divine and the human met and embraced in Him, that they might also meet in us. He lived and died and rose again, He rules on earth and in heaven, not for Paul alone, but for us, for all; not merely that the Jew and the Apostle might share his eternal life, but that both we and all men might lay hold upon it and share it. If we sincerely believe on Him, St. Paul’s words are as true on our lips as they were on his: “Henceforth I *live*; yet not *I*, but Christ liveth in me.”

To be able to speak these words with truth and strong conviction is the noblest ambition to which we can aspire, the greatest honour of which we are capable. But great blessings entail grave responsibilities. If God is in us

indeed and of a truth, we must try ourselves by new and higher standards. We shall be both able and bound to adopt St. Paul's argument, and say : " God is true ; the Son of God is true : and therefore I am true." And, again : " God is pure ; the Son of God is pure : and therefore I am pure." And again : " God is love ; the Son of God is love : and therefore for me too love is lord of all." We shall be able, and shall be bound, to run this argument through all the imitable perfections of Deity. For we cannot have a Divine life, and not manifest a Divine grace.

No doubt there are limitations and imperfections in our nature, and hence there must and will be flaws in our obedience, in the unity and correspondence of our will with the Divine will. We have not yet grown up into the full stature of Christ, whatever the advances we have made. Nor had St. Paul. Even he did not count himself " already perfect," or assume that he had already " attained to the measure of the stature of Christ." Yet he could say, " God is true ; Christ is true : and therefore I am true." He might now and then use " lightness of speech," or " purpose according to the flesh." But veracity was *habitual* to him, whether he was preaching, or writing, or making a promise. He was not *wont* to utter " deedless words," nor were his purposes and resolves at the mercy of every shifting breath of influence and caprice. The indwelling God made him sincere and steadfast. He measured his speech and conduct by, and adjusted them to, divine standards rather than human. He could not but do it, since both God and the Son of



God had come to him and taken up their abode with him.

And here lies the lesson to which I wish to lead your thoughts. We who profess to have God with us, to have the mind and spirit of his Son, should habitually, and in all things, measure ourselves, not against ourselves, nor by any human standard, but by the very life and character of God as manifested in and by his Son. This was St. Paul's standard, and should be ours—*must* be ours, if God dwells, if Christ lives, in us. For how can we judge and try ourselves by anything short of the best and highest that we know?

What shame the habitual use of this high standard would work in us, what self-condemnation, what earnest care, what clearing of ourselves from our old sins, what indignation against the forces of evil by which we have been subdued and betrayed, what fear lest we should again be overcome and ensnared by them, what longing for a loftier and nobler life, what zealous and resolute endeavours to rise into it, what revenge upon ourselves when we fail,—I must leave you to judge for yourselves.

For I do not wish to raise a multitude of questions in the throng of which we may lose sight of the most direct and immediate bearing of the Apostle's words; nor any longer to use theological terms, even though they be taken from the New Testament, under cover of which we may evade the charge which St. Paul implicitly alleges against us, and the warning which he addresses to us. On the contrary, leaving all other and larger applications of his words, I would fain bring you face to

face with that sin of *prevarication* which those words rebuke, and urge upon you that duty of *veracity* in word and deed which, I fear, was far more native to him than it is to us. For whatever other lessons his words may suggest—and they suggest many—we cannot doubt that the most direct and immediate lesson to be inferred from St. Paul's defence of his habitual veracity is, that we too should be able to argue with him, "Because God is true, we are true; because God is faithful to His word, our word is not Yea and Nay."

King Lear, maddened by the cruelty of his faithless and unnatural daughters, who had flattered him to the top of his bent, assenting to and extolling every word that fell from his lips, while he sat on the throne, but scorning him when once he had stripped himself of his wealth and power to enrich them, breaking their vows, and refusing his every petition—King Lear complains of them and of their base courtiers: "To say 'ay' and 'no' to every thing that I said! 'Ay' and 'no' too was no good divinity." And I cannot but suspect that, in putting these words into the mad King's mouth, Shakespeare was influenced by some reminiscence of the passage before us, was thinking of what St. Paul had said on the use of both Yea and Nay. At all events we may take Lear's complaint as an illustration of St. Paul's meaning, and learn that it will not be good divinity for us to be so infirm of purpose and to use such lightness of speech as to be for ever unweaving our own resolutions, falling away from our first intentions, and saying now Ay and now Nay, whether in word or in deed.

Let us observe, too, let us insist on the fact, that it is not intentional falsehood, nor indeed any large and desperate wickedness, which St. Paul repudiates and against which he warns us. His appeal is so tremendous, his argument sweeps so wide a circle, when he says, "*As God is true*, I am true," that we find it difficult whether to believe, or to remember, that all he is defending himself against is that infirmity of will which leads a man to employ lightness of speech ; to frame and to announce his intentions so thoughtlessly that he is for ever changing them, sometimes with reason and sometimes without. But he must be a very careless student of St. Paul who has not discovered that his mind so habitually dwelt among the sacred and august realities of Eternity that he constantly assigns the most impressive and majestic reasons for acts which hardly seem to demand arguments of so lofty a sweep. It is the manner of the man to apply the largest principles to the smallest details of life and conduct : for he knew that no motive could be too strong for those to whom every kind of goodness is so difficult as it is to us. And hence, just as elsewhere he urges a more humble estimate of themselves on those who were wise in their own conceits by nothing less than the example of Him who, when He was in the form of God, did not clutch at his equality with God, but humbled Himself to manhood, to death, to the cross ; so here he appeals to the fidelity of God, as a reason why lightness of speech and prevarication should be impossible to those who love God and profess to be of one will and one mind with Him.

And can we say that the motive is too great? Ah, no: for it is just these small virtues, or virtues which seem small to us, to the pursuit of which we need to be roused by the stimulus of strong motives, by an appeal to the largest and loftiest principles. We do not think much the worse of men for these sins of the tongue; nor do we think much the worse of ourselves for them. Think of our politicians, of the difference there often is between their public professions and their personal convictions, of the ease with which they charge each other with the worst motives and intentions, and of how they condemn measures and actions which, if they were in place, they would themselves adopt and approve. Think of our business men, and the amazing and immoral latitude of speech they allow themselves in buying and selling. Think of our private life, with its inveterate gossip, and its contemptible scandal. Recall such familiar characters as the man who suffers his tongue or his temper to run away with him, and is always saying more and other than he means; or the man who, impelled by vanity and self-conceit, habitually vaunts of witticisms he has uttered, though no one ever heard them, or of feats that he has achieved, though no one ever witnessed them; or the spotted and inconstant man who actually means one thing to-day, though he meant the very opposite yesterday, and whose speech reflects every change of his fluctuating moods. Remember how common this infirmity of will is, this lightness of speech, and how lightly even Christian men think of it; reflect how much misery and weakness and disap-

pointment it breeds, how it lowers character, how it fritters away the force of example, what contempt it brings on Religion or the profession of Religion : remember what an unspeakable comfort it is to meet with a man in whom you can trust, of whom you can be sure ; who really means what he says—who is always as good as and often better than his word ; and you will confess that no rebuke of prevarication can be too stern, no motive to veracity can be too strong. If all inconstancy of purpose, nay, if only all lightness of speech, were banished from the world, it would be a new world to us ; and how much better it would be, it is impossible to compute.

As we think on these things, then, let us resolve to try ourselves by St. Paul's standard : let us, if we cannot say, " Because God is true, I *am* true," at least say, " As God is true, I *must* be true. I know how weak I am, how changeful and inconstant ; how apt to mean one thing to-day and another to-morrow ; how prone to say more than I mean, or other than I mean, every day ; how I am betrayed by my vanity, or my wish to please, or, at times even, by my determination to differ, by a yielding habit of mind or a censorious habit of mind. But now that I see my faults, I will try to amend them. I will take God for my standard, and not myself or my neighbour." For if we thus aim to be faithful as God is faithful, and to follow the promptings of his truthful Spirit, even we shall " truthful be " at last, and " speak our Lord's sincerity."

## VIII.

### *THE YEA AND THE AMEN OF GOD.*

"For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, . . . was not yea and nay, but in him is Yea. For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the Yea : wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us."—2 CORINTHIANS i. 19, 20.

ST. PAUL'S opponents at Corinth did not scruple to defame him as infirm of will and light of speech, although he was one of the most earnest, steadfast, and sincere of men. "Variable as the vane," they said, "to one thing constant never, he says now Yes, and now No, on every question laid before him, as the convenience or interest of the moment may dictate. How can you trust a man so capricious, inconstant, insincere? Was he not minded, did he not promise, for example, to come to Corinth, in order that he might correct our errors and compose our strifes? Yet he does not come. He is afraid to come—afraid lest *we* should prove more than a match for him."

But St. Paul was not in the least afraid. It was to spare *them*, he says, to give them a space for repentance and self-amendment, that he deferred his visit to Corinth.

He had *not* used levity of speech ; he had *not* purposed after the flesh, when he was minded to come to them. That was simply impossible. He *must* be true, for God was true : and, through the grace of God, he had been made "a partaker of the divine nature." Hence the sincerity of God was a guarantee of his sincerity, the veracity of God a guarantee of his veracity. He was not, and could not be, guilty of the bad divinity of saying Ay and No too.

On the force, significance, and sweep of this argument, the argument of Verse 18, I spoke in my last discourse. But, forcible as it was, the Apostle was not content to rest his case here. In my text he advances another argument as strange, and as strong, as the first. After arguing that, because God is faithful, *he* must be faithful in all his words, he goes on to argue that, because Christ was not yea and nay, because the Son of God was the Yea and the Amen to all the promises of God, his (Paul's) word could not vacillate between Yea and Nay, his habit of speech must be as simple and sincere as that of Christ Himself.

1. Now this second argument is as illogical as the first unless we supply a suppressed premiss which St. Paul did not pause to state, since he had much to say in few words. For just as God's fidelity is no guarantee of Paul's veracity, unless Paul was a partaker of the Divine nature ; so the steadfast sincerity of Christ is no guarantee of his sincerity, unless he and Christ are one, one in being, one in thought, will, aim. But this oneness with Christ was, as you know, a fundamental conception of

the Christian life with St. Paul. It lay at the basis of his theology. He could neither preach a sermon nor write a letter without affirming or assuming it. So completely was he one with Christ that he affirms that he was crucified with Christ ; that he died when Christ died, and rose when Christ rose again from the dead. All he did he did *by* Christ, as well as for Him. All he suffered was but a filling up of the remnant of Christ's affliction. His motto, his characteristic word, might well be : " Henceforth I live : yet not *I*, but *Christ* liveth in me."

That being so, it was not unnatural that he should assume this doctrine of the indwelling Christ here ; and assume also that his readers would supply this premiss of his argument, which he did not think it necessary, or which it did not occur to him, to state. And, of course, the moment it *was* assumed, the Apostle's argument became sound, and even irresistible. For then it ran : The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is true ; Christ is in me, the spring of all virtue, as well as the hope of glory : and therefore I am, I must be, true. As He was not Yea and Nay, my word to you is not, and cannot be, Yea and Nay.

This great and inspiring truth of the indwelling Christ, of his incorporation in the Church, nay, of his re-incarnation in every one who believes on Him, is only implied in my text, however, and must not, therefore, be our main theme. Another truth, equally great and far-reaching in its scope, and not less suggestive of hope and comfort, is expressly stated, though stated in a some-



what curious and mystic form which obscures its immense significance from the casual reader of St. Paul's words. He speaks of Jesus Christ as the Yea, and perhaps also as the Amen, of all the promises, or—as the Greek word includes announcements, commands, decrees, as well as promises—of all the utterances of God, however many or however varied they may be.

Do his words call up any clear thought, any vivid conception, in your minds? They will do if you reflect upon them for a moment or two; for they place a great truth with which you are perfectly familiar in a novel and striking light, throw it into an impressive and memorable form.

St. John, as you know, identifies the man Christ Jesus with the Word, or Logos, of God. All the writers of the New Testament, indeed, imply or affirm Christ to be the sole medium through which God has revealed Himself, through which He has made known his character and will, whether we find that revelation in the works of his hands or in the words of his mouth. That is to say, according to these high authorities, Christ is the Maker as well as the Redeemer of the world—"all things were made by Him," and "by Him all things subsist;" He is the Dream and the Desire of all nations, as well as the Consolation of Israel: He is the Jehovah, or at least the Adonai, of the Jews, as well as the Jesus of the Gospels. *All* that God has done has been done by Him; all that He has said has been said through Him. He is the sole Mediator between God and man. All that is divine in nature or in history, all that is or has

been good in man or in humanity, comes of Him, without whom nothing was made which is made, and who is the Light of every man that cometh into the world.

This is the thought, fact, truth, which St. Paul here takes up and casts into a new and impressive form—a form worthy of so great and impressive a truth. For when he says that in Christ is the Yea and the Amen to every utterance of the Divine Mind, however many they may be, what he means is, of course, that Christ is the *Yes* to every thought of God's, the *So be it* to every purpose of God's; that it is Christ, and Christ alone, who translates the Eternal Mind into acts, into vital forms and quickening words. For example: in the beginning God said, "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness:" *that* was once simply a thought, a purpose, in the mind of God. The Son of God, the Eternal Word, formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul. The living Adam was Christ's *Yea*, Christ's *Amen*, to God's creative thought. Again, God said, "Let us re-create man in our image, after our likeness." The Son of God replied, "Lo, I come to do thy will." And the redemption of the Cross was Christ's *Yea*, Christ's *Amen*, to the redeeming thought of God. This, at least, was St. Paul's conception, his fixed and stedfast belief concerning the relation of God to his creatures, and of the means by which He has made Himself seen and felt by them. Through the ages every thought of the Infinite and Inaccessible Mind has been translated into actual fact, framed into words or wrought out in loveliness of

perfect deeds, by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the *So be it* of the Father. He is the everlasting *Yea*, the everlasting *Amen*.

*Therefore*, adds the Apostle, *our* word to you was not *yea* and *nay*. Is it not wonderful? He takes this sublime truth of the Logos, of the everlasting, all-creative, all-ruling Word, and applies it to one of the pettiest details of human life, uses it to prove that his promises were not made in lightness of speech; that, when he said he would visit Corinth, he meant to visit Corinth! He runs a parallel between the Word which was with God, and was God, and the word which he had spoken to his friends when he purposed one of the ordinary courtesies of life, or, at most, one of the common pastoral duties of his ministerial life. And he implies that his word answered as accurately and sincerely to his thought as the divine creative Word answered to the thought of God; that the everlasting *Yea* finds an echo and a counterpart in *his* *yea*!

It is not only wonderful, it would be altogether inexplicable, if we did not remember the manner of the man; if we did not remember that it was his habit to bring the grandest truths and the loftiest principles to bear on the slightest details of human conduct, and to brace himself, and us, for the lowliest duties by an appeal to the noblest and strongest motives. But if we remember his manner and habit of thought; if we also remember how commonly we find even the strongest motives not strong enough to bind us to a faithful performance even of the pettiest duties, we shall not be surprised to find

the Apostle drawing an argument for veracity from the faithfulness of God and the sincerity of God's Son. We shall, rather, adopt and apply his argument to our own case, and say: "Because God is true, we must be true; because the Son of God is sincere, we must be sincere."

2. But there is another way in which we may read St. Paul's words. They are capable of another interpretation—an interpretation of which I gave you a hint when I said, "Christ is the Yea, and *perhaps* also the Amen of God." For I do not think it was Christ, in his own person, whom he intended to set forth as the *Amen*, though it was undoubtedly Christ whom he intended to set forth as the *Yea*, of all the interior utterances, all the thoughts and purposes, of God. His words are very compressed, and cannot, therefore, be very clear. But read Verse 20 attentively, marking the way in which it is punctuated in the Revised Version—"For how many soever be the utterances of God, in him (*i.e.* Christ) is the yea: wherefore also *through* Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God *through us*"—and I think you will conclude that what he really meant to convey was that, while Christ *in Himself* is the Yea to all the thoughts of God, it is Christ *in us* who is the Amen to those thoughts. By his "wherefore also" the Apostle seems to warn us that he is about to add a new idea to that which he had just expressed, not to repeat his previous thought in a new form. And what can that new idea be if not that, just as Christ has been the Yea to all the thoughts and purposes of the Almighty, giving them outward being and shape, so also Christ lives and dwells in as many as

believe on Him, in order that He may work out *in and through them* such a hearty response to the Divine purposes that *they* may be the Amen to them; that they may meet each of the counsels of his will, as it is revealed to them, with a frank and grateful, "*So be it, Lord: Thy will, not ours, be done; for Thy will is a wiser, larger, kinder will than ours.*"

Taken thus, as I myself have no doubt it ought to be taken, my text not only gives us a new conception of the mission of Christ; it also gives us a new conception of the Vocation of the Church, of *our* vocation as Christian men. Christ is the Yea of God; *we*, through the power of the indwelling Christ, are the Amen. It is his mission to translate all the thoughts of God into actual and vital forms; it is our vocation, as we study that translation—as we see those thoughts taking shape, as they become visible and recognizable to us—to add our Amen to them, *i.e.* to accept, welcome, and conform to them. The power to add this Amen, to consent to and obey the will of God, we derive from Christ who lives and dwells in us. And this power is given to us with a view "to the glory of God through us." In fine, the vision which lies behind St. Paul's words, and which he labours to express, seems to be nothing less than this. He conceives of the infinite God as dwelling in the inaccessible light, and thinking out the thoughts of his eternal righteousness and love. He conceives of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as translating those thoughts into creative, providential, and redeeming acts. And he conceives of the vast congregation of those who love

God and believe on his Son as standing round and contemplating the Divine thoughts which take visible form at the behest of the Son, and chanting their loud Amen to all that He does, to all that He reveals of the Father's will. And if *that* was the conception he was labouring to compress into a single Verse, is it any wonder that the Apostle's words break down under the too vast burden he imposes upon them, so that we have to look at them again and again before we can catch their full significance?

3. And now, finally, what is the purpose, what the end, for which this splendid and far-reaching vision has been unfolded before us? what does it prove? what ethical lesson was it intended to convey?

It comes upon us with a shock of surprise—how can it but shock and startle our sense of proportion?—to learn that all this grandeur of thought, this solemn appeal to the sublimest truths and mysteries of the Faith, was intended by St. Paul to prove simply that he meant what he said when he promised a visit to his friends! On any but inspired lips such an appeal for such a purpose, would be condemned as profane by many righteous, perhaps by most religious, men. "What right has any man," they would demand with frowning brows, "to appeal to the sacred mysteries of the Trinity simply to confirm his personal sincerity and truthfulness? What right has he to liken his trivial chat about where he will go, and whom he will visit, to the steadfast and everlasting Yea of that Eternal Word by whom all things were made and all are to

be redeemed?" And, indeed, there are very few of us, I apprehend, who are not somewhat amazed by an appeal to such solemn sanctions on an occasion and for a purpose so comparatively slight, and who would not shrink from making such an appeal on our own behalf?

Yet, after all, what is this shrinking and surprise but a mournful witness to the unhappy divorce which we have suffered to creep in between our religious creed and our daily conduct? If it spring in part from reverence, does it not spring very much more from a confused notion that the fundamental truths in which we profess to believe are too high and sacred for human nature's daily use? In place in the Sanctuary, we assume them to be out of place in the shop or the street. We conceive, or feign to conceive, of them with a distant awe which robs them of their practical power—as too lofty, sublime, and delicate to be brought down into the dusty arena in which we wage our daily struggle, or the rough toilsome field in which we earn our daily bread. We forget that they are of no worth save as they govern our daily conduct, save as they supply that mainspring of motive and emotion which should inspire and control every duty we discharge, every courtesy we shew, every word we speak. We forget that if they are great, it is that they make us great; that if they are high, it is that they may elevate us; that if they are sacred, it is that they may hallow all we do. And, therefore, we need to consider St. Paul's example and to bear it in mind—need to remember how his whole being was so pervaded by a Divine Presence, and his life so habitually con-

formed to a Divine standard, that even his lightest word was as true as though God Himself had spoken it ; and that he drew inspiration and strength for the common duties of life from the sublimest truths of the Gospel of God's Son.

The charm, and peace, and blessedness of such a life as his—of a life based throughout on Divine realities, of being true in every word because he was a partaker of the Divine Nature, and of being steadfast and sincere because of the indwelling of the sincere Christ—needs no argument. The sense of stability and security which results from a life like this, the nobility of aim, its large freedom from care and fear, its sustaining trust, its unfaltering courage, its bright and immortal hopes,—all this at once discloses and commends itself to us, and would, we admit, be worth any effort, any sacrifice, that we can make.

What, then, is the sacrifice, and what the effort, by which alone we can attain this blessedness ? It is simply the effort and the sacrifice involved in rising into such a practical and habitual faith in the great verities of Religion as Paul possessed, and as most of us assume that we too possess. For if we honestly believe that Christ is the *Yea* to all the purposes of God, we shall accept whatever changes, trials, losses may come to us as coming from, or coming through, the hands of that Friend and Saviour whom we have so much cause to trust and love, and who is not less kind and tender and patient now that He rules in heaven than when He walked the earth. And if we really believe that He



Himself dwells in us, in order that we may chant our *Amen* to every dictate of the Divine Will which He reveals to us, whether in his Providence or in his Word, then surely all the duties of life will gain a new charm and a new sacredness for us. We shall feel that we are called to say, and even to sing, a glad *So be it* to all burdens, all commandments, all duties; *i.e.* to assent to them, to welcome them, to rejoice in them. There will be no reluctance, no hesitation, in our obedience when once we feel that it is Christ who brings the demand for obedience to us; and no grudge, no sense of being ill-treated and overtasked, in our submission when we are sure that it is He who lays our burden on us, and that He is waiting to hear us respond to his will for us with a grateful *Amen*. It takes all the difficulty out of obedience to know that Christ in us is the strength and life of obedience. It takes all the sting out of sorrow and trial to know that our discipline is framed for us by his wisdom and love; and that, whatever we have to bear, *He* bears it in us and with us. To believe that Christ is the *Yea* to all the utterances of God is to be enabled to add our *Amen* to every decree of the Divine Will.

Let this mind be in you, then, which was and is in Christ Jesus our Lord. As it is his honour, as well as his function, to say *Yea* to all the thoughts and purposes of the Father, however many they may be; so also, remember, it is at once your high calling and your honour to say your *Amen* to them all, however various they may be, and however difficult it may be for you at first to greet them with a frank and hearty welcome.

## IX.

### *MAN'S CRAVING FOR GOD.*

"As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?"—PSALM xlii. 1, 2.

"How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts ! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord ; my heart and my flesh cry out unto the living God."—PSALM lxxxiv. 1, 2.

BOTH these Psalms are by "the Sons of Korah." And the Sons of Korah were a family of Levites whose inheritance lay on the Eastern side of the Jordan. In the time of David they were appointed doorkeepers of the Tabernacle. They possessed the Hebrew faculty for music in an eminent degree ; and some of them became singers and players in the Temple choir, and cultivated their gift with such success that they founded a school of music which was called by their name. Some of them, moreover, of whom Heman seems to have been the most illustrious, possessed the closely allied faculty of poetical conception and utterance, and became "singers" in both senses of that word, composing the psalms which they afterwards set to music and chanted in the Temple.

Dwelling on the other side of Jordan, it was often impossible for them to reach Jerusalem. When the river swelled and rose with the melting snows of winter or with the heavy tropical rains which fell on the northern hills and mountains, the fords of the Jordan became impassable ; and the sons of Korah, even though their turn of duty had come round, were unable to go up to the house of the Lord. So, too, when the armies of Assyria, or some other foe, were encamped round the City, and no Hebrew was permitted to pass the lines of siege, they were shut out from the worship of the Temple through all the summer months.

Many, if not most, of their Psalms appear to have been composed at such times as these. They abound in expressions of intense passionate desire to appear before the Lord such as I have just read, and of intense passionate regret at their enforced absence from his House. Their writers thirst for God as the hart pants for the waterbrooks. They recall the beauty, the loveliness, of his House, the charm and power of its services ; nay, the very sparrows and swallows which used to flit through its courts and build their nests under its eaves. The very journeys to the Temple, often toilsome and hazardous, take on a certain sacredness from memory, imagination, and desire, insomuch that they can say that "the highways to Zion are in their hearts." They remember how they wept with vague, almost joyful emotion as they passed through the valley of Baca, the valley which led up from the Jordan toward Jerusalem, and whose famous balsam-trees wept balms ; and how they went

"from strength to strength," *i.e.* grew stronger and stronger, more and more joyful, as they topped the hills round about Jerusalem. To these ministers of the Sanctuary none seem so blessed as those who *dwell* in God's house, and are for ever praising Him. To these keepers of the Temple gates one day in the sacred courts is better than a thousand spent elsewhere ; and they would rather be doorkeepers in the House of God than sit and be served as chiefs in alien tents.

And if we ask, Why this intense craving for the Temple and its services ? the Sons of Korah reply : "Our heart and our flesh cry out for God, for the living God. It is because we want *Him*, and cannot rest until we rest in Him, that we yearn to traverse the valley of Balms once more, and to climb the hill of the Lord ; to stand in his temple, to see the swallows flitting through arch and column, to hear and to join in the music of the choirs."

Now here we reach the question I wish to raise, on which I shall ask you to meditate. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God ;" "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the Lord ;" "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God"—do these words, which to our colder moods, may seem exaggerated and fanatical, represent a general, an universal emotion ? Do they simply utter the experience of an ancient group of Levitical singers, or do they express one of the primitive intuitions, one of the profoundest yearnings and desires of every human heart, a yearning which no words

can adequately utter, much less overstate? Is *this* the secret of the restlessness which underlies all our rest—that we want God, and cannot be at peace until He lift up upon us the light of his countenance? Is it true, true to the facts of our own experience, that our corn and our wine may increase, that we may have “all the blessings of this life,” and yet, for want of God and of peace with Him, may be naked and poor and miserable, our “heart” aching with ungratified desire, our very “flesh” clamorous and unsatisfied?

I do not see, my brethren, how we can meditate on the facts of human life without reaching the conclusion, that to have God is to have all, though we should lack all else, and that to lack God is to lack all, though we should have all else. In the most singular way we are denizens of two worlds, the natural and the spiritual; and these two, opposed as they may seem, are really one, since the natural world is but the “body,” the complex phenomenon and organ, of the spiritual. Just as in the parables of our Lord, so also in the vast parable of human life, spiritual meanings and intentions are for ever breaking in upon us from natural facts; the charm of spiritual suggestion is for ever issuing from them and seizing upon us, insomuch that “the meanest flower that blows may give us thoughts which lie too deep for tears.” Apt as we are to forget God, to suffer ourselves to be engrossed by the tasks and pleasures, the gains and cares of our daily life, we *cannot* forget Him. He besets us behind and before, reveals Himself in every scene we contemplate, meets us in every path we tread. “Morn-

ing by morning," as we read in Job, "He sets Himself in the light, not failing."

So manifold are the ways in which the sense of a Divine Presence is quickened within us, and our need of that Presence, that it is hard to select those which are most suggestive and impressive. But let us glance at a few of them, giving the preference to those which are most frequently about us in our common life.

*Did* God make the country, and man make the town? But even in the town how many tokens of a Divine Presence do you encounter! As you walk down to business, do you pass through any street in which there is not some structure devoted to the service of God, or from which you cannot either see a spire pointing with immovable finger to the heaven in which He dwells, or hear a bell which summons men to worship Him? Every town in England is full of these holy Nazarites, consecrated to the Divine service. And if we are men, with discourse of reason, can we fail at times to reflect what this striking fact imports—that in almost every street the houses in which we live, the shops and factories in which we work and traffic, are broken with a House, commonly larger and more stately than our own, to which men habitually repair that they may meet with God? Nay, however careless and unreflective we may be, and though for the most part we pass these sacred structures without a thought of their purpose and intention, are there not times in which they rouse and move us all? Have you never, as you have gazed on the village spire rising from its clump of trees, felt your heart carried up-

ward, along its aspiring lines, into a loftier and purer air? Have you never heard a strange spiritual music, a holy mirth or a holy sadness, in the bells which call men to rest and worship or toll over an open grave? Have you never, as you went by the lighted windows of a church, and heard the voices of the congregation blend in a song of hearty praise, felt your spirit touched to finer issues, and had vague yearnings after a purer and calmer life awakened within you? And when you *have* been thus touched and roused, have you not known that what all the vague emotions and aspirations kindled within you really meant was, that your soul was thirsting, your heart and flesh crying out, for the living God?

Nay, more: even in those toils and cares of business by which the thoughts of many are drawn away from God, and from all that is highest and most spiritual in human life, there are still witnesses which speak to you of Him and of your need of Him. The more diligent, successful, and thoughtful a man of business is, the more quickly and thoroughly does he learn both that his success does not depend wholly on himself, and that the most unbroken success cannot meet and satisfy the inmost cravings of his soul. Let him but keep his eyes open, and he soon discovers that success in his trade or profession largely depends on that in himself, in his circumstances, in his neighbours, which *he* cannot altogether control; on his health, for instance, on his promptness and presence of mind; on his courage in risking ventures, or his prudence in refusing risks; on the qualities of the men against whom he happens to

be matched, and who may chance to be duller than he is or far abler than he is ; on the training and education his parents gave him, and the habits in which he has been bred ; on the fidelity of his workmen or their inexplicable humours and changes of humour ; on the honesty of those to whom he gives credit ; on the sudden, ever-shifting, and often incalculable changes of fashion ; or even on the warlike or pacific temper of a nation across the sea, or across the world.

Every observant and reflective man of business must feel himself at the mercy of such mere accidents, so large an element of uncertainty enters into his closest calculations, that the wonder is how he *dare* go to work without God, how he ever fails to learn that he can only escape the fangs of the most cruel anxieties and cares as he puts his trust in Him who rules all men and can compel all their conditions, all the chances and changes of mortal life, to subserve their good. If he be wise, the mere vicissitudes of commerce will teach him his need of God, his need of a rest and stay over which vicissitude has no power ; and even the Gazette may drive him to the Bible. Again and again, one should think, in his perplexities, his fears, his anxieties and regrets, the cry must arise within him : " O, for a true and allwise Friend to guide me, to teach me what to do and from what to abstain ; to make me independent of earthly fortune, with its buffets and rewards, so that *his* will be done in me and by me ; to lead me to the point at which all losses are turned to gain, and gain itself becomes the sweeter because it is his gift ! "



Men of business, do you never hear such a voice as that? It is the voice of your fainting heart and wearied flesh crying out for God, for the living God; it is the cry of a soul which pants and thirsts for Him: and only as you listen to that voice, and obey it, will you rise from a sordid, restless, and degrading eagerness for gain into a pure and tranquil life.

God is in the town, then, and in the life of towns. He is as truly in *this* town as of old He was in Jerusalem; and it is as easy to meet with Him in it, if only we seek his face. That He is also in the country has become one of the commonplaces both of modern poetic and modern religious thought. The parables of the Lord Jesus have taught us to see Him, and the truths which bind our spirits to his, in the processes of agriculture, in the phenomena of growth, in the beauty and the "glory" of flowers, in the sunshine, the wind, and the rain. Our own poets have taught us to find Him in mountain and wood and stream. If, for example, we walk and go into the country at the spring of the year, most of us, I suppose, recognize a spiritual presence diffused through the natural world. The tender greys and greens of the opening foliage, the pure tones of the early flowers, the notes of the lark dropping like a musical rain from the sky, the general hush that lies on the landscape, as though some secret divine extasy were rising toward the moment of revelation and disclosure—all these speak to us of the purity, the beauty, the bounty of God, and assure us that He who made all loves all, that He who made *us* loves *us*; and that, in his love, He is inviting

us to become pure even as He is pure, perfect even as He is perfect.

Or, again, if we go forth into the fields at Autumn, and mark the first tokens of decay blending with the mellow richness of the harvest hues—the falling leaves, the stubbled fields, the hushed song of the birds, the shortening days, the pensive and ominous tone of the entire landscape, all speak to us of the changes of life, and of that last change to which they conduct, and remind us of our need of Him who sits high above all change.

Nay, if, at any season of the year, we wander away from the haunts of men, and are alone with Nature, God makes us feel our need of Him, with a singular, and sometimes a surprising, force. Walk mile after mile over solitary moors every inch of which, as you look into it, is crowded with life and beauty ; or climb the mountains and pass from peak to peak, breathing the pure air, treading on the pure grass, drinking the pure water, noting the faces of the gray rocks sculptured with grey lichens in curves of pathetic beauty ; lift up your eyes over fifty or a hundred miles of plain, every span of which contains a world of marvels and of exquisite loveliness ; dwell on the thought of your loneliness, your helplessness, your utter insignificance in a scene so large, and amid forces so mighty ; contrast your impurity with the purity of all around you, and, if you be worthy of the name of man, your heart will sink, yet rise, under an overpowering sense of the Divine presence and activity and holiness, of the pure and awful, yet kindly, Hand in which you are held.

Or, again, a storm will isolate you as effectually as the widest distance from the ways of men. Let the wind blow till you cannot stand against it, and the cold rain fall till it chill you to the bone, or the sea toss you on its waves as if you were a straw, or the jagged lightnings stab the dark clouds as though seeking a hidden foe, and the thunders roll and echo into a peal in which no instant of silence can be discerned : and, standing face to face with these fierce elements, you will feel that you are also face to face with God. Your heart and your flesh will cry out for Him who is a Refuge and a Strength in every time of peril and of trouble.

And thus it goes with us, my brethren, wherever we are, whatever we do. We stand on this large solid-looking world, but we cannot rest in it ; for only a thin partition, only a half-transparent veil, divides it and us from another world, the world in which the Father of our spirits and of all spirits abides ; and at any moment the veil may be lifted, and we may be compelled to feel that this world is not all ; that it is not solid, but fluid with change ; that, should we gain it all, we could not therein be content. The finger, the spire, of a Church will suffice to rend or lift the veil, or the sound of a psalm will blow it aside. The cares and changes of business, the solitude of mountains and moors, or the deeper solitude of a storm which may strike *us* down and leave our nearest neighbour untouched—any one of these will raise and part the veil which but thinly hides the spiritual world from us and Him who rules it.

And a thousand accidents of the day or the night

may subserve the same great end, wiping away the film of custom, preoccupation, and indifference from our eyes, and opening up glimpses to us of the world within the world. A great success or joy may come to us, and make us fear, for the first time, lest we should die and lose it; or a great sorrow, adversity, or shame, may come, and make us hope that we shall not live. We may wake from a dream, occasioned by a mere sound in the night, with the whole world reeling round us, terrible unknown possibilities of harm haunting the darkness, and feel that we can only be safe in his hands to whom the darkness is as the day. Our *flesh* cries out for Him when we fall sick and infirm, and the brain shrinks from its tasks, and the vigorous hand drops down. Our *heart* cries out for Him, the one true Love, when other loves fail us, and again cries out for Him, the one perfect Love, when we are beloved by one who shares our imperfection. Day by day, in short, a thousand voices wake within us and cry for Him, a thousand cravings teach us that it is He for whom our souls are athirst, who alone can satisfy all our needs.

But all this, it may be said, is no genuine outcome of our nature as men; it is merely the result of the faith, or the superstition, in which we have been bred. It does not bear witness to the existence of God, but to the fact that we have been taught to believe, or to assume, that there is a God. But if that be so, how do you account for the fact that the soul of *every* man cries out for Him, and always has cried out for Him? How do you account for the spectacle of the

ancient heathen cities in which we are told there were almost as many temples as houses, and more gods than men to worship them? How do you account for the fact that men, untaught of Heaven, have *invented* gods to help them in their business, to guide them amid the uncertainties of life; gods of sleep to rule their dreams and to protect their slumbers; gods of storm, to control the raging elements; gods for the sorrowful, with balms of comfort for the stricken heart; gods of healing for the infected flesh; gods of love to hallow and sanction human affection? The pantheons of heathen races are peopled with the incarnated cravings and desires of men; and this vast crowd of imaginary deities is but a manifold expression of their thirst for the living God.

If we can make no better use of the idolatries of the world, let us at least make this good use of them; let us summon them as witnesses to man's craving for God; let us call on them to prove that this craving for a Divine Friend and Helper is not the mere product of any faith, or any superstition, but one of the primitive and inbred intuitions of universal man. From the beginning, and in every land on which the sun looks down, so soon as men could read and interpret themselves with any intelligence, there has risen the cry which we still hear as often as we pause and listen to the voice of our own hearts; the cry for God—the cry for a God who not only once appeared unto men, but is always at work in the world, shaping all things to his mind; the cry, not for a dead creed, or for a pro-

bable account of what God is and what his policy may be, but for a living Person, for an active Ruler and Friend, who loves us, and dwells with us, and is able to satisfy those deep desires for wisdom, for goodness, for peace which we cannot satisfy of and for ourselves.

It is the happiness of every Christian minister, as it is also his function and duty, to proclaim that this yearning after God is no vague misleading fire bred of human imaginations and fears, but a true light which has been kindled at the great central Orb of Light round which the universe revolves. The God whom we crave, for whom we thirst, is not far from any one of us. He is with us, and within us. If we yield to our craving, if we listen to the cry of our heart and flesh, and look for Him, He will reveal Himself to us.

That He was once in the world and manifested Himself to men, most of *us* already believe. But this is not the whole truth, nor the main truth about Him. He who once dwelt with men, going in and out among them with a grace and kindness which won all simple and childlike hearts, is still in the world. He rose out of it only that He might be more truly and inwardly in it. He went away only that He might come again, come with new power, as will to will, spirit to spirit, heart to heart. It is He who has shed forth the influences which have raised and bettered the world for eighteen centuries. It is because He is still with us that there is any goodness, any loyalty to truth and righteousness, any charity for men, any devotion to the Divine will, in our hearts and lives. At any

moment we may pass behind the veil which hides Him from our senses. So soon as any touch of sickness, sorrow, fear, joy, love, makes us think more of that which is spiritual than of that which holds by sense, we find ourselves in his immediate presence, in the closest relation to Him, with the profoundest sense of our need of Him.

Sooner or later all else fails us—health, wealth, occupation, amusements, friends ; and we have to fall back on ourselves. And as self, least of all, can content us, as we find ourselves to be full of weakness, defect, sin, we are driven onward and upward, from self, to God. Only as we trust, love, and reverence Him, can the cry of our heart be stilled, and the infinite hunger of the soul be satisfied.

X.

*HEMAN'S ELEGY.*

PSALM LXXXVIII.

IN *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan tells us that, soon after Christian and Hopeful had left the kindly shepherds of the Delectable Mountains, as they went on their way Christian beguiled the tedium of the journey with the story of Littlefaith who was robbed hereabout. "The sturdy rogues," he says, "who plundered him have been a terror to stronger men than he. They have left scars and cuts even on the face of Greatgrace. They made David groan and moan and roar; yea, *Heman* and Hezekiah too, though champions in their day, were forced to bestir themselves when by these assaulted."

Now David we know, and Hezekiah we know; but who was Heman? Most of you, I expect, would be puzzled to say; for you may not remember that any notable man of this name figures in the Old Testament. Men better read in the Bible than most of you have been puzzled to say: for *two* men of note bearing this



name are mentioned in the Old Testament, and some critics have thought that Bunyan's *Heman* was *one* of these, and some have thought he was the other ; while some have cut the knot by assuming that the two men were only one after all.

But, however perplexed you may be by this small critical problem, I trust none of you will attempt to solve it as Southey did. For, in his edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he prints *Mordecai* where Bunyan wrote *Heman*. Why? Simply because, with all his reading, that good critic and staunch defender of the Church had never heard of Heman ; and because, with all his conscientiousness, he did not take the trouble to turn up the name in his Concordance, and so save himself from one of the most ludicrous blunders ever made. With all the confidence of ignorance, he first assumed that Heman must be a misprint for *Haman* ; and then, sure that Haman could never have been cited as a champion of faith, he calmly substituted the name of *Mordecai* for that of Haman ! I really do not know where we could find a more telling example of the perils attendant on that species of the higher Criticism which, by the aid of some infallible instinct, or of some mechanical rule, professes to determine what some ancient writer *must* have intended to write ; though it would be easy to adduce many blunders as absurd as Southey's from recent critical work on the poems of Virgil, the dramas of Shakespeare, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

If, instead of squaring our guess with the vain and

misleading "shows" of our own ignorance, we take the trouble which even so learned a man as Southey did not take, we shall be led to a deeper admiration of Bunyan's intimate knowledge of Holy Writ. For, by turning to the passages indicated by any Concordance, we shall discover that there were apparently two Hemans who attained eminence in Israel. The one was a singer, a musician, a seer, who, with two other gifted Levites, superintended the vocal and instrumental music, the service of song, in the temple of David (1 Chron. xv. 16-22; xxv. 5), and whom David consulted on all matters of worship and religion. The other was a sage—of the same era, probably, though of another tribe—who was so well known to be one of the wisest of mankind that, when the sacred chronicler wished to exalt Solomon above all men, he says (1 Kings iv. 31) that Solomon was even wiser than Heman, and than two or three other great sages who were then reputed to be among the masters of those who know.

It was this later Heman (if, indeed, the two were not, as I suspect, one and the same man), Heman the Ezrahite, Heman the Sage, whom Bunyan described as having suffered violence from the sturdy rogues who robbed Littlefaith, and left scars and cuts even on Great-grace himself.

But what authority had the Puritan dreamer for affirming that the wise Heman well-nigh lost his faith as he drew near to the end of his pilgrimage? Simply this: that—as *he* knew, though the poet Southey did not—Heman was probably the author of our Psalm; "the

saddest psalm in the whole Psalter," say the Commentators, "the darkest and gloomiest of all the plaintive psalms," "one wail of sorrow from beginning to end," unrelieved by any note of trust or hope. For the most probable rendering of the curious, obscure, and apparently contradictory title prefixed to the psalm<sup>1</sup> is: "A song, or hymn, given to the Sons of Korah (to be set to music): and given (subordinately) to the Leader of the plaintive instruments (probably, the strings); for antiphonal singing. A didactic composition, *by Heman the Ezrahite*." So that Bunyan, though he had to dig for it, had ample authority for describing the ancient Hebrew sage as one who had had to fight his doubts and keep them down; as one whose soul, when it neared the great darkness, was sorely beset with the misgivings, forebodings, and fears, before which Littlefaith's face went as "white as a clout, and he had neither power to fight nor to fly."

I cannot altogether concur, however, in the verdict which pronounces this to be the saddest of *all* the Psalms. At all events, to me, it is not the most pathetic. It lacks the human touch, the passion, the profound and piercing emotion of the Psalm (li.), for instance, in which David confesses and bewails the great sin of his life, and can only cry, "Unclean, Unclean!" Its sadness is of a rarer, and a thinner, kind; the sadness of one who has wearied himself by much study of a large and varied experience, who has thought of all things till all things have grown doubtful to him, till he finds the trail of the

<sup>1</sup> See Jennings and Lowe *in loco*.

serpent in all the fairest scenes of human life, till he doubts his very doubts. It is the intellectual sadness of one who, in long brooding over the wrongs and sorrows of time, the frailty of man, the limitations of human thought, the vanity of the ends which men commonly pursue, the cravings which importune a satisfaction they never find, the mystery by which our being is encompassed, the impenetrability of a future which nevertheless we *must* try to penetrate, has lost touch with the warm and breathing activities of human life, its cordial and strengthening charities, its common joys, its cheerful hopes, and has sunk towards a pessimistic despair of the life which now is on the one hand, and, on the other, into a prying and credulous curiosity as to the conditions of the life which is to come. And that, happily, is a misery which is comparatively rare. It lacks that note of universality which awakens an echo in every heart. It is a malady of thought, of culture, of a mind seeking to climb too high and to breathe an atmosphere too thin and rare. There is more blood, more passion, in David's lyrical outcry, more of that common touch of nature which makes all men feel their kinship with him, and accept him as their spokesman.

Not, however, that Heman's sadness is not a very real one; and one which has many to share in it even to-day. For this, too, is an age of culture, and of a culture very similar to the age of Solomon; when commerce was taking a new start, and the fine arts commanded attention, and men of letters were studying and editing ancient literature and traditions, and speculation was rife, and

men of science, from Solomon downward, gave a tone to the time, and the more adventurous spirits were beginning to break away from the simple but narrow faith which had contented their fathers, and to call in question the very axioms and assumptions on which that faith was based.<sup>1</sup> "The malady of thought" is as common now as it was then; and the tone of *Ecclesiastes* is as familiar to all students of the time as it was to Solomon or Heman himself. What was Carlyle, or what Schopenhauer, but a Preacher of a less hopeful and more damnatory tone than Koheleth? And where shall we find "a being drawing *thoughtful* breath" who is not keenly sensible of "the still sad music of humanity," who is not either saddened, or at times well-nigh maddened, by the wrongs and follies and miseries against which we seem to fight in vain?

I am not about to analyse this utterance of a mind diseased by doubt, and shaken from the peace of trust and hope by cruel misgivings and fears; or to expound the Psalm to you verse by verse. There is no need to undertake so painful a task. For my present purpose it will be enough if you observe that the two facts which filled Heman's soul with trouble were by no means unusual facts. They were (1) the growing infirmities, the frailties and sicknesses, of age (Vers. 1-7); and (2) the loss, or the real or supposed alienation, of friends, which often accompanies age, especially when it is sick and weary of the world (Vers. 8-18). He feels that his "life is drawing near to the grave" (Ver. 3) and that

<sup>1</sup> See the Dissertation on *Elihu*, in my "Commentary on Job."

"lovers and friends are far from him"—alienated from him, perhaps, or indifferent to him, now that he can no longer serve them (Ver. 8), or, perhaps, removed from him, put to a distance from him, by death (Ver. 18).

These are common facts, but they are none the more welcome for being common when they come home to us personally. They are only too common; but our Sage, not being a common man, instead of taking them as in the natural course and order of life, was compelled to brood over them, to ask what they meant, to realize their full bitterness. And as he broods over them, he resents them, as we all do at times, and laments his feebleness and isolation. Nay, as he traces all the facts and events of human life to the hand of God, he charges God with all the responsibility, all the pain and bitterness of them, and concludes that even this great Friend has forgotten him or has turned against him. With all his wisdom he has been, as he confesses (Ver. 15), of a sceptical and misgiving temperament from his youth up—a man of a careful as well as of a learned spirit; and now, in the feebleness and fearfulness of age, he is distracted by "the terrors" of God, by the gloomy and ill-boding thoughts which these common but pathetic facts of experience breed within him.

And it is both curious and instructive to mark how, throughout the Psalm, whether it is his own infirmity which he bewails or the loss of friends, the mind of this Wise Man is straining toward the great darkness in which so many of his lovers and companions have been swallowed up, and into which he is himself about to

pass. He is for ever speculating on the physical and moral conditions of the world which lies in or beyond that darkness (Cf. Vers. 4-6, 10-12). He cannot get away from the theme. He is for ever fingering it and returning to it.

These, in brief, are the contents of the Psalm. And there are two ways in which we may view them with benefit—either making the best of them, or making the worst of them, in so far at least as they bear on the character and aim of the Author of the Psalm.

That we are at liberty to take either view, no man can well doubt. For it would be a grave mistake, and would lead to the most dangerous consequences, were we to assume that, because Heman's thoughts about life and death are in the Bible, in this elegaic poem, we are therefore bound to adopt them, or even to sympathise with them. There is much in the Bible which was written, not for our admiration or adoption, but for our warning and admonition. And it would be simply puerile of us, now that Christ has brought life and immortality to light, to think whether of life, or of immortality, as Heman thought of them. Are *we* to cherish moods of despair when we grow old and feeble, and our life draws near to the grave? Are we to murmur that all is darkness when we are compelled to look beyond the grave? Obviously, we are *not* bound by the Psalmist's limitations, and should be doing despite to the truth and grace which came with Christ were we to take the Psalmist's tone.

If, then, we bring a generous spirit to the interpretation

of his Song, or Elegy, and put the best construction on it we can, our first reflection on it will probably find expression in the familiar maxim: "In much wisdom is much sorrow." We shall admit that the psalm fathers itself—that its author must have been a philosopher or sage. We shall say, "The more a man knows, the more conscious he becomes that he knows but little, and knows that little but superficially, never getting deep down into reality, into the causes and final purposes of things. A thoughtful mind is a *pensive* mind. The larger and more varied a man's experience, the more profoundly aware he grows of how little there is in it to satisfy the soul, as well as how little there is to answer the questions of that reasoning faculty which looks before and after. The more he sees of human life, the more he feels how much there is in it which is wrong, foolish, base, disappointing, if not hopelessly corrupt and bad." And so we shall begin to make excuse for Heman, and to acknowledge it was only natural that a man who had seen so much and thought so much should be sad at heart.

But if we remember that in much wisdom is much sorrow, let us also remember that in much sorrow there is much discipline, and discipline by which a wise man should profit. *Do* you, do all men, resent the wrongs of time? Remember that *resentment*, then, as well as the wrongs which provoke it; and consider what a happy omen lies in the fact that men do hate and resent that which is wrong, and both love and demand that which is just and right. *Do* you grieve, not only over your own



sufferings, but over the sufferings and losses which all men have to endure? Do not forget that unselfish grief, then, when you brood over the miseries of mankind ; for you are in the image and likeness of God : and must not He who made you what you are share in every pure and noble emotion you experience? Must not He be afflicted in all the afflictions of men, and intend to turn their sorrows and yours into joy? *Do* you fret over the limitations of human thought, or the lack of moral culture, which often prevent men from knowing what they need to know whether for wise guidance in the present or a bright and steadfast hope in the future? Do you lament the too slender connection between thought and action, so that even when men know what is right they do not do it ; when they have and approve the true ideal of life, they do not always pursue it? Do not forget, then, how you fret at these limitations and lament these defects when you remember how common and fatal they are ; but be sure that God will give men what *you* would give them if you could—more light to walk by, as fast as they will receive it, and more love, that they *may* walk by it ; and that He is preparing and enabling them to receive these gifts of light and love by that very discipline of suffering which you are tempted to deplore.

In much sorrow is much discipline ; and if we still put the most generous construction on Heman's words which they will bear, we may even *see* how, by the discipline of doubt and sorrow and fear, he was being led to higher conceptions of truth and duty. As we study his Psalm we shall say that, in his frequent allusions to the gloom

of the grave, and in all his interrogations as to whether God's wonders were to be shewn in the dark and his righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ; whether his lovingkindness was to be declared in the pit and his faithfulness in Abaddon ; whether the dead would arise and praise Him, Heman, like Elihu, like Job, like David, like most of the best minds of his age, was feeling after a truer and nobler conception of the future life than the theology of his day warranted or approved. We shall conclude that the current and traditionary dogmas on the unbroken darkness of Hades, its shadowy and cheerless existence, its lack of all which deserves the name of life, were growing incredible to him ; and that he was rising toward, and learning to faintly trust, the hope that all wrongs would be righted after death, that there would be no more night, no more crying, in the world to which he drew nigh ; that the wisdom and goodness of God *would* then be vindicated, his lovingkindness declared, and that, freed from all infirmity, men *would* arise and praise the Lord when they passed into his more immediate Presence, and could see that He had done all things well.

Finally, if we approach the Psalm in a more critical mood, it still yields us a lesson by which we may profit, and a lesson very pertinent to some of the conditions and needs of our own time. Those who decry "mere human wisdom" are very likely to conclude that Heman the Sage was punished for his largeness and freedom of thought, that he was abandoned to the guidance of his own wisdom in order that he might learn how little it

could do for him in the gravest emergencies of life, how little therefore it was worth. And, again, those who have studied the lives of such men as Coleridge, Clough, Amiel, and have seen how, by yielding to the charm of constant meditation on the problems of human life and conduct, they developed the power of abstract reflection at the cost of action and decision, grew irresolute and sceptical until, at last, they came "to *shirk* life rather than practise it," will be apt to conclude that Heman was of a temperament such as theirs, and suffered the very punishment they had to endure.

If, then, yielding in some measure to the judgment of such critics as these, we conceive of the Hebrew Sage as a man whose inveterate habit of inquiry and speculation drew him away from the simple trust of faith, and whose tendency to weigh all things in the balance of reason, and to demand logical proof for the truths which appeal to spiritual instincts and affections, avenged itself on him by inducing an habitual scepticism, a settled sadness, a paralysis of the will, a pessimistic despair both of this life and the next,—still his example is full of instruction for us, full of admonition. I see no reason to judge him thus harshly indeed. I find much in his Psalm to lead us to a more kindly judgment. But, doubtless, there are many among us to whom such a description *would* apply. Which of us does not know men, or know of men, whose eye, being no longer healthy or single, rays out gloom on all on which they look; the very light that was in them being turned into darkness? Which of us does not know, or know of, men who, measuring all the mysteries

of the universe in the scales of logic and refusing to believe what they can neither comprehend nor prove, find the commonest duties of life grow doubtful to them, or are driven to confess that duty, morality, rests on no firmer basis and can claim no higher authority than the divided thoughts of men can give it? Who does not know, or know of, men to whom the bright and sustaining sense of a Divine guidance and sympathy and support has grown incredible, who have lost the clear and cheerful hopes which spring from faith in a better world to come, and who yet are so conscious of the immensity of their loss, and so bent on repairing it, that they credulously tamper with the vulgar superstitions and irrational speculations of that which calls itself *Spiritualism* for no better reason, apparently, than that it busies itself mainly with the *physical* conditions of a world which no sane spirit would condescend to inhabit.

Heman *may* have entered, he may have taken a few steps on, the path they tread so confidently; for much of the ancient Eastern wisdom was of an occult character: but, nevertheless, he stands a whole heaven above these modern dabblers in the supernatural. For *he* could not have lost all faith in the great Father and Saviour of men who called on God day and night, although he won no answer, or does not tell us that he won any answer, from the silent skies. And *he* could not have wholly distrusted the pure and kindly Will which clothes the law of duty with an imperative sanction who longed to see that Will justified and declared. And *he* was no vulgar "spiritualist" who, instead of seeking to

"materialize" the spirits of the departed, or sitting in darkness to witness "manifestations" and to listen to words less wise than his own, was for ever asking: "Is the life beyond death a true life? is it a life worth living? Will it redress the wrongs of time, and vindicate the ways of God with men? Is the world to come a world of righteousness and charity and peace, in which truth will lift her veil, and all alienations and enmities will be swallowed up in love?"

Let us take the warning, my brethren. Let it be enough for us to know, as we do know on the best authority, that the life beyond death is one in which the faithfulness and lovingkindness of the Lord of our life *will* be declared, in which He will at once reveal and vindicate his holy Will, in which we shall at last become righteous even as He is righteous, and perfect even as He is perfect. What can the spirits which "peep and mutter" add to that? or what authority can the hirelings who prey on the credulity of their fellows adduce which can for a moment be compared with that of Him who conquered death for us all, and threw open the gates of Paradise for all, or even as compared with that of the holy and devoted men who received their inspiration from Him?

Do not misunderstand me, however. In condemning these vulgar traders in a vulgar superstition, I am not condemning the natural instincts which, in every pure and tender soul, crave assurance that those who loved us while they were here still love us and know that we still love them, or the gentle fancy that they may still

hold fellowship with us in ways we cannot understand, and come to our help and comfort. When I am happily at work I often feel as if my best thoughts were *given* me, since they seem to come of their own accord, and sometimes wonder whether some kind hand which I once knew has been stretched out toward me. But natural, and gentle, and harmless as these fancies are, what are they, after all, as compared with the great assurance which comes to us straight from the Lord of *that* world as well as of this : that our friends have passed, and that we too shall soon pass, into a happy region in which all the mysteries of time shall be solved, all its wrongs righted, and in which both we and they shall abide with Him in righteousness, in love, in peace for ever ?

## XI.

### *ETHAN'S PSALM.*

“Lord, where are thy former mercies, which thou swarest unto David in thy faithfulness?”—PSALM lxxxix. 49.

THE two first points to which the experienced student of any poem, and especially of any difficult poem, turns his attention are these : first, to ascertain the character of the man who wrote it ; and then to acquire a knowledge of the theme, or subject, by which he was inspired. To know the man and the influences by which he was moulded is, perhaps, our greatest aid to an intelligent apprehension of his work ; but it is only less helpful to be familiar with the historical incidents and details which gave form and colour to his treatment of the subject he had in hand. In the case of any ancient poet, as in that of some of the Hebrew psalmists, it is difficult, where it is not impossible, to recover such an image of the man, and of the form and pressure of his time, as will clearly illustrate the songs he has left behind him. But, at times, we can recover at least enough to invest his work with a new interest and power ; while, now and then, we may recover all that we practically need in order to gain

a tolerably clear and full conception of his intentions and aims.

We have already, for example, got some light on Psalm lxxxviii., by putting together the few scattered notices of Heman (one of the "sons" or school of Korah) contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. Born in the age of David, but moulded mainly by the literary and religious influences and methods of the time of Solomon, we found him to be a singer, or poet, who took the first rank in the school to which he belonged; and a sage of wide culture and of large experience, who had acquired a habit of speculation which tended toward a sceptical and pessimistic conception of human life, the influence of which could be traced in almost every verse of his elegy or psalm. If, after all, he remained a somewhat thin and shadowy figure in our thoughts, it was, nevertheless, something gained to have conceived of him as a thinker who, like Coleridge and Clough and Amiel, had developed the contemplative habit of mind at the cost of the practical; or as an antique Matthew Arnold, looking down pensively from the heights of culture—but with more sympathy and less contempt—on the vanity of the ends which men commonly pursue, on their lack of light and sweetness.

Of Ethan the Ezrahite, however, we may form a much more complete conception than of Heman, his colleague and friend. Like Heman, he was born in the age of David, but moulded chiefly by the influences, literary and religious, which characterized the time of Solomon. Like Heman, he was one of the four sages



who were deemed so wise that it was held a compliment to say of Solomon himself that he was even wiser than they (1 Kings iv. 31). Like Heman, too, he was one of the three singers set over the service of song in the House of the Lord (1 Chron. vi. 44), one of the leaders, or conductors, of the Temple orchestra who marked time for the singers and players on instruments, not with a baton, but, as the fashion then was, by the clash of his brazen cymbals (1 Chron. xv. 19).<sup>1</sup> He must have been, therefore, a man of high culture, of large and varied experience, of trained and practised wisdom, as well as a poet and a musician of the most approved skill.

In his Psalm, moreover, he gives us the last results of a long life of observation and experience. For this Psalm could not have been written until the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign; and by that time a man who had risen high in the public service under David must have reached a great age: probably, indeed, he was one of the "old men that had stood before Solomon," and whose counsel Rehoboam rejected against himself. That his Psalm

<sup>1</sup> There are, apparently, two Ethans mentioned in the passages cited above; one a sage of the tribe of Judah, and the other a musician of the tribe of Levi. But, as the genealogical methods of the Jews permitted a man to be reckoned as a member of more than one tribe, it is easier and more reasonable to identify the two and believe they were one, than to accept so strange a coincidence as that there should have been two Ethans, and two Hemans, so closely connected together, yet belonging to two different tribes and following different walks of life. The reasons for this identification are well given in Jennings and Lowe's *Critical Notes* on this psalm, and in *The Speaker's Commentary*; and need not, therefore, be repeated here.

could not have been penned before this date all critics are agreed—many of them, indeed, for what seem to be very insufficient reasons, place it much later—and may be inferred from the Psalm itself.

The occasion which prompted it was, probably, that memorable invasion of Palestine by Shishak, the reigning Pharaoh of Egypt, which is most fully recorded in 2 Chronicles xii., and to the result of which an allusion has been found in the sculptures of Karnac. From the sacred chronicler we learn that, in the fifth year of Rehoboam, Shishak came up against the King of Judah, took the border fortresses which Rehoboam had fortified (the "hedges" and "strongholds" of Verse 40 of our Psalm), and laid siege to Jerusalem itself. The degenerate son of Solomon had not only alienated the ten tribes by his tyranny, but both he and his people had fallen away from God and stooped to the foulest vices of the neighbouring idolatries. It was to avenge, and to correct, these sins that God permitted the Jews to fall into the power of Egypt, their ancient and hereditary foe. While the vast alien host gathered round the walls of Jerusalem, the prophet Shammai was sent to the king and his foolish young councillors with the warning and rebuke: "Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, therefore I also have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak." For the moment the rebuke took effect. The king and his princes, shaken from their insolent self-sufficiency, humbled themselves before the Lord. And because they humbled themselves, God promised that they should not be destroyed, but delivered within a

little while. Meantime, however, they must be taught the difference between the service of God, the King of heaven, and the service of the kings of the earth (2 Chron. xii. 8). To teach them this weighty lesson, Shishak is permitted to take the city, to despoil the Temple and the Palace of their treasures, and even, as the Chronicler notes with a special tone of shame and anguish, to carry off the golden shields of Solomon.

Whether Rehoboam himself was carried into Egypt for a time, in order that he might grace his conqueror's triumph, we are not told by the Hebrew historians. But in the monumental pictures at Karnac, Shishak is depicted as presenting before his god *Amun* a man of marked Jewish features, who bears before him "on his embattled ring" the motto *Judh-melek*, or "King of Judah." And the least that can be inferred from this fact is that Rehoboam was reduced to the disgrace of vassalage, and that, for a time at least, his kingdom became a mere province, paying tribute to Egypt.

Now if you will read the Psalm with these facts well in mind, I do not hesitate to say that it will become wholly new to you, that it will grow full of a meaning and a force which you have never seen in it before. Time would fail me to give you a verse by verse exposition of it ; I can only glance at its leading features : but even thus I think you will see how much the Psalm gains from our knowledge of Ethan and of his theme.

The King of Judah, the Lord's Anointed, he wails (Verses 38-45), has been dishonoured ; his crown has been hurled to the ground and defiled in the dust ; his

frontier-fortresses have been broken down, all his strongholds reduced : his glory has passed away ; a haggard old age has come upon him in early manhood ; he is covered with shame. In short, the Poet tells us briefly, and in biting verse, the selfsame story we have just heard from the Chronicler, only adding to it those tones of grief and indignation and shame which are natural to a poet who is also a patriot, a lover of his country and loyal to his king.

But Ethan is far too thoughtful, far too wise, simply to bewail these miserable and shameful facts. He meditates on them ; he sets himself to understand them, to get at their inmost meaning, their Divine intention, and to learn the lesson with which they are fraught. In this strife and endeavour of thought he raises a problem by which *we* are often perplexed : *viz.* the apparent opposition between faith and fact, between the events of human life and the declarations of the Divine Will. For, as he meditates, he remembers the covenant which God had made with David, and the promise sent him by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. vii. 8-17) ; how God had sworn unto David, "Thy seed will I establish *for ever*, and build up thy throne *to all generations*" (Psalm lxxxix. 3, 4, 19-29). Yet David's grandson was hardly settled on the throne before ten out of the twelve tribes revolted from him. He had hardly organized the two loyal tribes into a separate kingdom before he was hurled from his throne, his fortresses broken down, his capital plundered, his people slain, and he himself degraded into a vassal of the ancient adversary of Israel ! Could there be a more

glaring and unmitigable opposition between the gracious intention announced to David and these tragic catastrophes which made Rehoboam the spoil of all that passed by (Ver. 41)?

How, then, was this opposition to be explained, this forbidding and insoluble problem to be solved? Neither the covenant, nor the catastrophes which seemed to set it at nought, were open to question: the covenant was on record, Ethan probably was one of the first to whom it had been made known; and as for the catastrophes, they had taken place under his own eyes. What ground, then, was left for faith and hope?

Confronted by the same problem in a modern form, John Stuart Mill hastily concluded that a God who could permit the miseries and calamities which darken human life must be either limited in power, or of an imperfect goodness. And, strange to say, our ancient sage and poet discusses the problem from both these points of view. He asks himself, first, is God not able, is He not strong enough, to keep his word and to carry out the purposes of his love and compassion? And then he asks, if He is able, is He not good enough, is He not true and faithful to the word He has spoken, to the purpose He has framed and announced? And his answer to both these questions, widely as it differs from that of our modern philosopher, is untinged by doubt or hesitation. There is no lack of power with God. He has no rival in heaven or on earth. The heavens are his; the earth is his also, the world and the fulness thereof. He rules the pride of the sea—the very emblem, to the

Hebrew, of rebellion and commotion—and stills its stormy waves. He has a mighty arm: strong is his hand, and high his right hand over all that rise up against Him. Of old He had broken Egypt, now so proud and triumphant, in pieces, and scattered all the adversaries of his people with the arm of his strength (Verses 6, 9–11, 13). Nor is He less good and faithful than strong. With unabated, unfaltering conviction Ethan sings of, nay, takes for the very theme of his song, “the mercy which endures for ever, the faithfulness which extends to all generations” (Verses 1, 2). In a single verse (Ver. 8), indeed, he sums up his faith in God as both able to keep and sure to keep his word: “O Lord God of hosts, who is a *mighty* one like unto thee? and thy *faithfulness* is round about thee.”

Obviously Ethan is a man of a more robust temperament than Heman. As meditative, as experienced, as wise, his mind is not “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,” nor fretted into pessimistic misgivings by doubt. He can face the facts of life unalarmed, and the contradictions of thought which those facts are apt to breed in those who reflect on them. And, therefore, we ask, with the keener interest, on what ground it was he took his stand, from what secure loophole of retreat he looked out on these collisions of faith with fact which robbed Heman of courage and hope, and by which we are so often puzzled and distressed.

One refuge in which many have taken shelter from the strife of doubt and fear was closed against him. As he could not admit, with Mill, that God was limited in

goodness or in power, so neither could he admit, with certain Calvinistic theologians whom, I suspect, Calvin would have disowned, that men deserve nothing of the God who made them, that they have no claim on Him ; that their sins, their innate depravity or their actual offences, sufficiently account for and justify all the miseries they are called to suffer. This solution of the difficulty did occur to him, indeed, but only to be rejected ; although he rejected it for a reason different to that which we should assign. *He* did not argue, as we might do, that if men are *born* wicked, they are not responsible for their wickedness ; nor did he dwell on the incontrovertible fact that many of the calamities which men suffer do *not* spring from their personal transgressions. There was no need for him to pursue this line of argument ; for the case he had in hand was limited by singular conditions. God had foreseen that the descendants of David would sin against Him, and had pledged Himself with an oath that even their sins should not turn aside his mercy from them. The very covenant in which He had promised to build up David's house and throne for ever contained the proviso (Verses 30-37) : " If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments, if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes : *but my mercy will I not utterly take from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail ; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.*" So that the very honour, the very oath, of God was pledged not to do

what, apparently, He had done to Rehoboam ; pledged not to abandon him to his adversaries, let him sin as he might. *This* covenant, at least, was not contingent on human fidelity and obedience. It was absolute. It was to cover all transgressions. It depended on nothing but the faithfulness of God Himself. And yet, to all outward seeming, it was not kept. Rehoboam's throne was not built up ; his kingdom was rent in twain ; and even the remnant which remained true to him was abandoned to its foes. Reduced from a king to a vassal, the seed of David became a spoil and a reproach to all its neighbours.

Where, then, did Ethan find ground for faith, for trust and hope ? how did he reconcile, how could he reconcile the promise, the covenant, the declared will of God, with the miserable and shameful facts which laid a heavy burden of thought and pain on the closing years of his long life ? Simply in the conviction that God had sent these calamities in mercy, *for correction, for discipline*, and not in anger, *for destruction*. Simply because he cherished the belief and hope that God was *keeping* his covenant with the seed of David, not breaking it ; that He was visiting their transgression with a rod which would chasten and purge them, and their iniquity with stripes by which they would be healed, instead of taking away his mercy from them and suffering his faithfulness to fail. Hence he could plead with God : " How long, O Lord ? wilt thou hide thyself for ever ? " and beseech Him to remember how short man's time is, how frail men are ; to remember also the mercies He had pledged



Himself to shew to the seed and kingdom of David, and to deliver them from the reproach of their enemies (Verses 46-51). Hence he could look through the darkness by which he was encompassed, and still sing of the blessedness of the people who know the joyful sound which summons them to worship, and who walk in the light of God's countenance ; and say of them, "In thy name do they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness are they exalted ; for thou art the glory of our strength." Nay, even in that time of peril and shame and reproach, he could cherish the hope that the foolish, and headstrong Rehoboam would still prove himself to be a true king and shield to his people, because "our shield belongeth unto the Lord, and our king to the Holy One of Israel."

Now it is this indomitable trust in the power and the goodness of God ; it is this resolute and unyielding conviction that all the apparent contradictions between the facts of experience and the declared will of God are only discords which will make the ultimate harmony more profound and sweet, that all the pains and sorrows of time are intended for discipline, not for destruction, and speak to us of the mercy as well as of the severity of God,—it is this conviction which we most of all need in an age in which so many doubts are rife, in which there is so much to breed strife and apprehension in every thoughtful mind, and in which so many of the most thoughtful are tending toward unbelief and a settled despair of ever seeing the world become what it ought to be, if He who made us all loves us all and is seeking

to save us from our sins. It is this conviction which we most need to cherish if, under the burden of *our own* frailties and imperfections and sins, we are to entertain the hope that we ourselves are to become what we would be, what we are trying to be. For indeed, *we* have to face the very problem which pressed on the mind of the Hebrew sage and singer; and we can only meet it with courage as we are sustained by the hope which supported him under the infirmities of age, and of a painful tragic experience which might well have extinguished the light of hope in a soul so brooding and contemplative as his.

God has declared his will *to us*; He has entered into *a covenant* with us. He has sent his Son into the world that the world through Him may be saved; sent Him to open the kingdom of heaven on earth, to found a Church in which men of every race and blood may become one, and against which the powers of evil shall never prevail. It is now nineteen centuries since Christ came and dwelt among us, to shew us the Father, and to declare his will to be our salvation. And yet *is* the world saved? *Have* all men been drawn into the kingdom? *Is* the Church one—one in heart and will and aim? The Church is *not* one, but rent with divisions and strifes. The world is *not* saved, but still, for the most part, goes after its lusts. The kingdom of God has *not* come; Christ does *not* reign everywhere, always, and over all: there are but few hearts in which He bears complete and absolute sway. And as we consider these facts, and how they contradict the hopes we have based

on the word and will of God, on his covenant and promise, if we are not to sink, with Heman, into doubt and despair, only one resource is open to us. We must believe, with Ethan, that God works in the darkness as well as in the light ; that all these trials of faith, these disappointments and sickening delays of hope, are intended for correction, for discipline, and not for destruction. We must learn to see the mercy of God in his severity. We must hold fast to the conviction that He is visiting the transgressions both of the Church and of the world with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, in order that He may not take his mercy from us, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. We *must* walk by faith, and not by sight ; and when sight clashes with faith, it is our wisdom to lean to the nobler alternative, and to trust where we cannot trace the faithfulness and love which are working, in ways we know not, for the redemption of mankind.

Nor is the contrast between the testimony of facts and the hopes inspired by faith less tragic and disheartening in our personal experience than in the experience of the world at large, or less apt to breed sadness and despair. Who can compare what he is with what he hoped to be, what he meant to be, what he knows *God* meant him to be, without shame, without a burning indignation against himself, without fearing lest it should prove that he never truly entered into covenant with God, or that he has so long and deeply violated the covenant as to prove that he was never called to glory, honour, and immortality ? It is long, perhaps, since we

first believed, or thought we did ; long, since, as we assumed, we became new creatures in Him and set ourselves to grow up into Him in all things. And when we compare our present spiritual condition with what we then hoped it would be, with what we understood God to promise it should be, we are tempted to give up all hope of ourselves, if not to lose confidence and trust in the redeeming love of God.

Now it is here that the wise and much-experienced Ethan steps in to our help. Without in any manner seeking to abate our sense of sin, or our shame for sin, he teaches us that all our sorrow and shame, so far from proving that God has forgotten to be gracious to us, is a proof that He is correcting us for our transgression and purging us from our iniquity. He affirms that by this discipline God is once more drawing us to Himself, urging and constraining us to say to Him : " How long, O Lord, is it to be thus with us ? Wilt Thou hide thy face for ever ? O remember how frail we are, how short our time is, and lift up upon us the light of thy countenance ! " And only as we take his counsel shall we be able to sing of a Mercy which endures for ever, and of a Faithfulness which extends to all generations. Let us take his counsel then, follow his example, and cleave to the conviction that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne, and that mercy and truth go before his face.

## XII.

### *ASAPH'S THEOLOGY.*

"Whoso sacrificeth thanksgiving glorifieth me ; and to him that ordereth his way (aright) will I shew the salvation of God."—PSALM l. 23.

"And I said, This is my sorrow, that the hand of the Most High doth change."—PSALM lxxvii. 10.

LIKE Heman and Ethan, Asaph was one of the three Levites whom David "set over the service of song in the House of the Lord" (1 Chron. vi. 39). Like them, he was a leader, or conductor, of the Temple chorus and orchestra, whose duty it was to set Psalms to appropriate music, and to mark time for the voices and the instruments by the clash of his brazen cymbals. He was, therefore, a skilful musician and composer of music.

Like his two associates, moreover, he was also a poet, and *wrote* some of the Psalms which he set to music for use in the Temple. Indeed no less than twelve of the songs included in the Psalter are attributed to him. But as some of these Psalms (*e.g.* lxxiv. and lxxix.) refer to the destruction of the Temple, they could not have been written by Asaph himself, since that catastrophe was still in the remote distance when he died ;

but were probably composed by "the singers, the sons of Asaph" (Ezra ii. 41): for, like Korah, Asaph was the founder of a school of music and poetry which was called by his name, which flourished for several centuries, and long continued to breathe his spirit and copy his manner. Of three of these Psalms, however—l., lxxiii., and lxxvii.—we may assume Asaph himself to have been the author, since there is absolutely no reason, except the desire of a certain critical school to bring every Scripture down to the latest conceivable date, why he should not have written them; while they all possess a charm and power which led the Jews of later generations to place Asaph well-nigh on a par with David himself: even in the Bible we read of "the days of David *and Asaph*," and of "the words of David *and Asaph*," as if an almost equal honour were ascribed to them (2 Chron. xxix. 30; Nehemiah xii. 46).

Asaph was a prophet, as well as a musician and a poet. "Asaph *the seer*" appears to have been his recognized title (2 Chron. xxix. 30). And though the sacred chronicler records none of the particular prophecies which he was inspired to utter, they do tell us how the spirit of the Lord came on one of the sons of Asaph "in the midst of the congregation," and moved him to predict the triumph of Jehoshaphat over the combined forces of Ammon, Moab, and Edom (2 Chron. xx. 14 ff.): so that prophecy seems to have been a "note" of his sons or school. But, as we have constantly to remember, the main function of the prophet was not to interpret, not to give a voice to, the shadows which

coming events cast before them, but to teach, illustrate, and enforce the great moral and spiritual truths which lie at the foundation of all true religion. Nay, more, the main office and task of the Hebrew prophet was, as I believe, to preserve and to enlarge that Gospel which, according to St. Paul, was "before the law." This Gospel, the Apostle argues, the law, which came long after, could not and did not disannul. It was the mission of the prophets to keep it alive. And hence, side by side with the priests who administered the ordinances of the law, and the judges who enforced its code, we find, in every stage of Hebrew history, a class of men who set themselves to bring out the spiritual intention of the Levitical services, and to depict the moral character which the Mosaic code was intended to produce ; a class of men who believed in God as the Lord and Father of the Gentile as well as the Jew, who recognized the universal scope of his fatherly and redeeming love ; and who could pour contempt even on the most exact observance of the Law if it did not induce men to do justice, to shew mercy, and to walk humbly with their God : a class of men, therefore, who preserved and developed the great primitive tradition, or evangel, which we can trace, through the revelations made to such men as Job and Balaam, Abraham, and Melchizedek, and Enoch, right up to Adam himself. In short, while the Levitical code and services were apt to produce a narrow formalism, apt to lead the Jews to dwell on their exclusive privileges as an elect race, and to carry themselves as though the salvation of God were confined to

them, it was the task of the prophets to maintain that this was not the true intention of the Law ; but that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, he that disposeth his way aright, is acceptable to Him ; that while salvation is *of* the Jews, it is *for* the world at large.

It is because this prophetic, this spiritual, element pervades most of the Psalms, that the Psalter has become the hymn-book of the Church in all ages and in all lands. But this prophetic element is much more notable and abundant in some Psalms than in others, in the Psalms which we most commonly read, for instance, because we find them most in harmony with the mind of Christ. And in none of them is it more conspicuous than in the three Psalms which we may reasonably attribute to Asaph. For these three Psalms treat of the spirituality of all true worship, and of the mystery of the Divine Providence,—themes which have always had a singular attraction for all deeply religious and prophetic souls. In Psalm l. we are taught that no worship is acceptable to God, however authentic it may be in outward form, if it does not spring from and express a thankful obedience to his Will ; and in Psalms lxxiii. and lxxvii. we have an earnest attempt, from slightly different points of view, to justify the ways of God with men, in which Asaph rises to the noble and spiritual conclusion, that sin is its own punishment, and piety its own exceeding great reward.

Now it is impossible that, in the limits of a single discourse, I should give you a detailed exposition of



these three Psalms. Nor shall I attempt it. All I shall endeavour to do is to put you in a position in which you may study them for yourselves with new interest, and lay hold of their leading thoughts, or principles, with a firmer grasp.

I. The Fiftieth Psalm has for its theme *the spirituality of all true worship*; and Asaph deals with this prophetic theme in the manner of a true and even of a great poet. He does not simply enunciate his theme, and argue it out, as a logician or a moralist might do. He suffers his imagination to play round it, and invests it with a wonderful pomp and charm. Briefly put, the conception in his mind is this. As of old Jehovah descended on Sinai to *give* the law, so now He comes down on Zion, the perfection of beauty, to *interpret* his law. A fire still burns before Him; a tempest rages round about Him,—so awful is his immediate presence to the sons of men, however gracious the errand on which He may come (Vers. 1-3). He utters his voice, and summons to his seat all whom He has loved and to whom He has revealed his love, all who have entered into a covenant with Him by sacrifice (Vers. 4, 5). When they have gathered before Him, He explains the reason of his advent. He has not come, as He sometimes came, because they have broken the letter of his covenant with them, because they have neglected the forms of worship, or withheld the offerings prescribed by the Law. Their sacrifices and offerings, He says with an accent of weariness and disgust, are *always* before Him. But to what end do they draw nigh to Him, how

*can* they draw nigh to Him, while their hearts are far from Him? Is *He* a hungry God, like the gods of the heathen, to be gratified with the mere steam of their sacrifices? Every beast of the forest, the mountain, and the field, is his. He does not need their sacrifices. He does not care for them save as an expression of their devotion and love. Will *He* eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? What He cares for, what He seeks of them, is a loving, grateful, and obedient heart, a life attuned to his will and service? If they would really worship Him, they must sacrifice thanksgiving and pay unto Him the vows which they had made in the time of their sorrow and distress (Vers. 7-15, 23).

But gratitude breeds love, and love obedience. How, then, can they love and serve Him while their hearts go after their lusts? So long as they are disobedient to his plain commandments; so long as they are unjust, violent, impure; so long as they "weave" lies with their tongue and speak one against another; so long as they cherish the hope that God will not see, or will not punish, these obvious infractions of their duty to their neighbour, they are simply abhorrent to Him. They have no right to speak of his statutes, or to make mention of his covenant. They are *not* his elect, *not* his beloved. And if they do not consider and amend their ways, He cannot listen to their prayer, or deliver them out of their distresses; nay, He Himself may be compelled to rise up against them and tear them in pieces (Vers. 16-22).

And so Asaph reaches his fine catholic conclusion, that none but those who sacrifice thanksgiving and

dispose their way aright can truly serve and please the Lord ; but that *whosoever*, without distinction of class or race, comes before Him with a loving heart and an obedient life shall see and taste the salvation of God.

Now this was a prophetic thought, a part of that original and universal Gospel which was anterior to the law, which gave all its virtue to the law itself, and which has both outlived the law and been disclosed to those to whom no written law or gospel has been revealed. The Prophets are full of it. Thus Isaiah represents God as saying to the Jews of this time : "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me ? I am sick of your burnt offerings." Micah repeats the question of Balak and Balaam's reply : "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand rivers of oil ?" "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Hosea puts into the mouth of Jehovah words which Christ Himself stamped with approval : "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." And Jeremiah is very bold, seeming altogether to deny the worth and the authority of the Levitical ordinances, since He makes God affirm : "I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices ; but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto my voice, and I will be your God and ye shall be my people, *and walk ye in the way that I command you*, that it may be well with you."

But, surely, this truth—the inwardness and spirituality of all true worship — so familiar in the mouth of the Prophets, must have come right home to the hearts of the men of Israel when it fell from the lips of a Levite, a minister of that worship on which it seemed to pour contempt ; when Asaph not only preached this truth to them, but embodied it in a psalm, had it sung in the Temple, and set them themselves to sing it. The sound of this Psalm must have risen round the altar of sacrifice like a protest against all sacrifice which was not the expression of a thankful and a loving heart, which was not the pledge of a pure and obedient life. A Levite, one of the priestly caste, who was also a prophet ; a minister of the altar who disdained any altar but that of the heart, was a rarity and a wonder in Israel—as, indeed, he is in any Church which clothes its ministers with an absolving power and invests its sacraments with a quasi-magical charm. And hence Asaph's protest against all merely outward and mechanical forms of service, his scorn for any offering but those of thanksgiving and obedience, his assurance that *whosoever* came before God with a grateful heart and a docile will had already found salvation, must have come home to the Temple congregation with a singular and impressive force.

Strangely as this prophetic truth might sound in the Hebrew temple, it is nevertheless the common property of the human race. No great religious literature is without it. The foremost spirits of every age and faith have seen that obedience is better than worship, that it is the only true worship, or at least that no worship can

be true and sincere which does not express, or issue in, or promote, a will attuned to the will of God, a pure and righteous life. Only the other day I held in my hands an ancient Buddhist MS. written at least five centuries before the birth of Christ. And the substance of this MS., as the scholar who shewed it to me informed me, was a conversation between a venerable Buddhist priest and a Hindu disciple who came to be taught "the way of salvation."

"What ways have you tried?" asks the priest.

"I have offered many sacrifices to the gods," answers the disciple.

"Why, that is well; reverence is a great virtue. But what else have you done?"

"I have bathed every day in the sacred stream."

"Why, that too is well: cleanliness is next to godliness. But have you done nothing more?"

"O, yes: when my wife has offended me, I have tried not to be angry; when my servants have cheated me, or my neighbours have wronged me, I have tried not to requite evil for evil, but to return good for evil."

"Ah, then," exclaims the good old priest, "you are *in* the way of salvation, and need not that any should teach you to find it!"

So that this truth comes to us, not on the authority of Hebrew Psalmists and Prophets alone, but on that of the wisest and best men of every age; and, moreover, I am bold to say, it instantly commends itself to our consciences and hearts, if at least we are seeking the salvation of God.

Whoso is wise, then, will neither neglect nor rely upon outward forms of worship. He will observe and value them in proportion as they nourish and sustain in him a loving and an obedient heart, knowing that only as he brings the true, the divine, order into his life can he be saved from his sins, saved unto life eternal.

II. In Psalms lxxiii. and lxxvii. Asaph, from slightly different points of view, deals with a theme, a problem which seems to have taxed all the more thoughtful minds of the age of David and Solomon ; a problem which has lost none of its interest, and none of its mystery, even for us on whom the true Light has shined.

In the former Psalm (lxxiii.) he is brooding mainly over the prosperity of the wicked (Vers. 2-12), of such hard, worldly, and full-fed men as we may see around us to-day ; men bent on getting gain, on pushing themselves into notice and importance, on securing and enjoying what they hold to be "the good things of this present life" to the full. It irks and puzzles him to see that, while the righteous cleanse their hearts and wash their hands in innocency only to be plagued all the day long and chastened every morning (Vers. 13, 14), these bad bold men, who wrong and oppress their fellows and make a mock at God, are suffered to reach their ends, that they are always at ease, and increase in riches.

In the latter Psalm (lxxvii.) he is brooding mainly over the adversity of the righteous—his own adversity. He has been true to God ; he has sought the Lord in the day of trouble and cried unto Him in his distress, but he is neither comforted nor delivered ; he is left to

waste away in the hands of sorrow and calamity till he feels as if God had cast him off, had forgotten to be gracious, and will be favourable to him no more (Vers. 1-9).

In both cases the root of his sorrow is that "*the hand of the Most High doth change*," that it moves uncertainly, inexplicably, as if it had no set purpose and were working toward no definite end; that "God does nothing," as Carlyle roughly put it, or nothing that He had promised to do. For Asaph had been bred in the conviction that the Judge of all the earth requites men according to their deeds, even in this present time; whereas, so far as he could see, the blessings promised to the righteous fell on the wicked, while the threatenings addressed to the wicked were fulfilled on the righteous.

Here, then, was one of those collisions of faith with fact with which we are all familiar: for which of us, after forcing himself with much difficulty to do that which seemed right and kind, has not found his very forbearance turned against him, and suffered loss because he preferred the ways of honesty and honour to the crooked paths of policy and self-seeking? Asaph is confronted with the very problem which, in some form, puzzles and distresses us all; and therefore it is with a very quick and lively interest that we watch him to see what he will do with it, how he will solve it.

He does not profess to have reached a full solution of it; for, after all that he can say, he invites us to trust in a Wisdom we cannot fathom and in a Mercy we cannot comprehend. But he offers us one or two calming and helpful thoughts which any of us to whom this problem

is alive and pressing will acknowledge to be of an unspeakable value.

First of all, he holds fast his faith, let facts say what they will, in the law of retribution. He is sure that "punishment *is* the other half of sin," that the two cannot be divorced for long. The mills of God may grind slowly to creatures who, as compared with the Inhabitant of Eternity, are only as the ephemera of a moment, but they grind exceeding small, and grind out with an inevitable exactness the due recompense of every man's deeds, whether they be good or bad. The prosperous wicked, however solid and secure the structure of their fortune may look, stand on slippery places, and will slide down to destruction in an instant. They and their doings are *God's bad dream*, which He will despise the moment that He awakes (lxxiii. 16-20).

And, then, he discovers that as sin is its own punishment, so also piety is its own reward, but a reward in a far higher sense than that in which sin is its own punishment. For, *here*, he does not dwell on and apply the law of retribution. It is no outward or temporal recompense for which he looks, no accession of fortune and honour, no such happiness as the world can either give or take away. No: *God Himself* is to be his reward. That God holds his right hand, to guide and sustain him in all his ways, whether they lead through darkness or through light; that he is to be continually with God, enjoying a constant and growing communion with Him; that, even when flesh and heart fail him, God will be the strength of his heart and his portion for



ever,—this is his sole and sufficient recompense : for who is there in heaven or on earth whom he desires as he desires the God who is the Refuge of all who put their trust in Him (lxxiii. 23-28) ?

Last of all, he looks, and bids us look, for an everlasting reward, an immortality of service and joy : “Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, *and afterwards* receive me to glory.” “It is this conviction,” says Dean Perowne (in his Commentary on this Psalm), “which finally chases away the shadows of doubt, and brings light and peace to his soul,” as it will do to ours, if only we hold it fast. “And this conviction is the more remarkable because it is reached in spite of the distinct promise of temporal recompense to piety, and in the absence of a full and definite revelation of the life to come,” such as it is our happiness to possess. For “in the clear light of another world and its certain recompenses, such perplexities either vanish, or lose much of their sharpness. When we confess that God’s righteousness has a larger theatre than this world and the years of man, we need not draw hasty conclusions from ‘the slight whisper’ of his ways which reaches us here.”

Let any man, perplexed in faith by the mystery of God’s dealings with men, hold fast to the three convictions which calmed the troubled soul of Asaph ; let him believe in the retribution which lurks in every act we do, and which must work itself out as life goes on ; let him believe in God and in fellowship with God as the truest and highest reward which even righteousness itself can secure, because such a faith will not only be counted

to him for righteousness, but will make him righteous even as God is righteous ; let him believe in a world to come in which all wrongs will be redressed, and every sincere attempt to serve God and man will issue in larger capacities for happier service,—and if the Divine Providence does not lose all mystery for him, that mystery will at least lose its burden of pain, and he will be able to rest in the counsel of Keble's familiar hymn :

Till Death thy weary spirit free,  
My God hath said, "'Tis good for thee  
To walk by faith, and not by sight."  
Take it on trust a little while ;  
Soon shalt thou read the mystery right  
In the full sunshine of his smile.

These, then, were Asaph's two main contributions to the theology of his time, and of all time : this doctrine of worship, and this vindication of the ways of God with men. Neither of them was new ; they were both the common property of the Prophets, parts of that Gospel which was as old as Abraham, nay, as old as Adam himself. But they came with special force from the lips of one who was a minister of the altar, and who had himself passed through the agonies of doubt. They were not new then ; they are not obsolete now. *We* need them, need to think and to live by them, as much as any who went before us. For only as we order our ways aright shall we learn that the hand of the Most High does *not* change ; and only as we believe that his hand does not change, that through darkness, and through light, it is working out the abiding purpose of his fatherly and redeeming love, can we both see and rejoice in the salvation of God.

### XIII.

#### *THE UNCOVENANTED MERCIES OF GOD.*

“ I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever ; with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness unto all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever ; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.”—PSALM lxxxix. 1, 2.

ETHAN, the author of this psalm, was, as I shewed you a fortnight since, an accomplished musician, a poet of no mean skill, and a sage only less wise than Solomon himself. Old enough to be one of the three leaders of the Temple service of song in the time of David, he lived through the long tranquil reign of Solomon, and even through the earlier years of Rehoboam's reign. He must, therefore, have been a man of great age, and of large varied experience, as well as a man of many gifts, when he penned this psalm. For the psalm could not have been written before the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, when his kingdom had been rent by the revolt of the ten tribes, and the son of Solomon, the grandson of David, had been degraded into a vassal of Shishak, the tyrant of Egypt. This latter catastrophe seems, indeed, to have supplied the motive, the occasion, of the psalm. It involved one of those collisions of faith with fact which

set every thoughtful and devout mind beating against the bars of its cage. God had entered into "an everlasting covenant" with David, and had confirmed that covenant with an oath, in order that "by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie," He might put an end to the strife of doubt, to the apprehensions of an imperfect faith. In the most absolute and unconditional form, God had pledged Himself to establish the kingdom of David and his seed for ever ; to beat down all their adversaries under their feet, and to maintain their throne as long as the sun and the moon should endure. Every loophole of escape was stopped beforehand. For God had promised that even if David's children should break his statutes and forsake his law, though He must "visit their transgressions with the rod and their iniquity with stripes," his mercy He would not take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail : "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Nevertheless, within two generations after this impressive covenant had been signed, sealed, and delivered, all its conditions, all its promises of good, appeared to have been violated. David's kingdom was rent in twain, nay, reduced to a tiny province barely fifty miles square ; and David's grandson, so far from beating down his adversaries, was trodden under foot by the hereditary foe of Israel.

What wonder, then, that as Ethan recalled and weighed the clauses of the covenant, and compared with them the political facts of this disastrous year, his mind was tossed into an agitation and distress from which he

could find no relief save in the large adventure and conclusion of faith,—that the calamities which had fallen on David's kingdom and seed were, after all, only the loving corrections by which God was chastening them for their transgressions, only the stripes by which their iniquity was to be healed ; and that, therefore, so far from breaking, God was fulfilling, his covenant with them.

This, at least, was Ethan's conclusion of the whole matter, as I shewed you a fortnight ago ; the conclusion which enabled him, even amid the disasters of Rehoboam's reign, to sing of the mercy of the Lord as enduring for ever, and of his faithfulness as extending to all generations. And I have reverted to the theme this morning, not to enlarge and complete our consideration of the special illustration of it which he had in mind ; but that, with this historical illustration of it well in our memories, we may single out the catholic and universal note of his conclusion, and learn that even God's covenants with men are but particular instances of his general ways, of his dealings with humanity at large : so that, in the very fullest sense which the words can be made to bear, it is true that his mercy endures *for ever*, that his faithfulness extends to *all* generations, that his mercy must be built up for ever, and his faithfulness be established in the very heavens—the heavens which surround and embrace the entire world.

There is grave reason, I apprehend, why we should settle and clarify our thoughts on this point. For there is a very general impression abroad—and the Church is largely answerable for it—that a radical and

vast difference obtains between what are called the covenanted and the uncovenanted mercies of God ; that but for certain promises which He has made, and certain engagements into which He has entered, we should have little to hope for from Him. There are many who believe and maintain that it is only as we avail ourselves of these contracts or covenants, and fulfil the stipulations by which they are conditioned, that we can look for his salvation. More than once I have myself been handed over to "the uncovenanted mercies of God," by some slender stripling who seriously mistook himself for "a priest;" and that in tones which implied that I should find those mercies very cruel. "No salvation out of *our* Church" is a cry which has been raised by every Church in turn. And most of *you* must remember the figure of more than one venerable man who gravely doubted whether any but Baptists would find their way to heaven, and never doubted but that, if they did, they would occupy only an inferior and subordinate place. The Doctrine of Covenants plays and must play a large part in every system of theology ; and these Covenants are often read, not as disclosing the mind and will of God toward humanity at large, but as conferring special privilege and grace on certain elect persons, or on an elect society or church, which they have done nothing to deserve, simply because God has promised to do more for them than He will do for others. If the posterity of any other religious man, or king, had suffered the calamities which David's grandson provoked by his tyranny and disobedience to the Divine law, Ethan, in

all probability, would have seen nothing in these calamities to perplex his faith: but, because God had made certain promises to David and to his seed after him, this wise man's mind was all clouded with a doubt. It never occurred to him, apparently, that, without a promise, God would do for any faithful servant, for any good man, for any king who loved and wrought righteousness, all that He had promised to do for David. It never seems to have occurred to him that God was bound by anything but a covenant, or that God could not possibly enter into any covenant which was not based on the general principles of his moral government, which did not therefore express his will for all men. And, in like manner, let any man believe himself to be one of the elect, or a member of any Church which he holds to be the only true or orthodox Church, and he feels himself, to have special claims on God, claims on his mercy and faithfulness, which he owes to nothing but the promises which God has made to that Church, or to the covenant into which He has entered with his elect. To such an one it does not occur, or, if it occur, he finds it hard to believe, that every Divine promise is but a limited expression of a general principle; that every Divine covenant, even if it be made with a few, is nevertheless made for the benefit of the many, and can only be an instance of his ways, an illustration of a mercy as wide as the heavens, and of a faithfulness which extends to all generations of mankind.

And yet that which he finds it so hard to believe is demonstrably true. Why, the meanest flower that blows,

finding itself provided with all things necessary to life and fruitfulness, might assume that the Maker of all had entered into some special compact with it, and that the whole universe was organized solely for its welfare : but was it, therefore, organized only for a single root ? And the humblest servant in our Father's house, because he has enough and to spare, may assume that the Father of us all has his eye especially on *him*, and that the whole household was organized purely for his benefit : but was it, therefore, organized for his benefit alone ? And, indeed, every man being a creature infinitely important to himself, we are only too ready to venture on such an amazing assumption as this.

But a moment's thought will shew us that just as no good man, if he is also wise, can deliberately promise to do that which is inconsistent with his character, or at variance with the general tenor and rule of his life, so God can make no promise inconsistent with *his* character, no promise the fulfilment of which will not accord with and illustrate the principles on which He invariably acts and by which He governs the world. The Eternal cannot change. He who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, cannot be one thing to one man or to one race, and another thing to another man or another generation. The Almighty cannot limit his power, and, least of all, his power to bless men and to do them good. The Allwise can give no promise which He will afterward see cause to regret, and which He will keep only because He has pledged his word. The Allgood cannot bind Himself to do that which is



unjust, partial, unkind, unduly favourable to this man, unmercifully severe to that. And hence his grace and bounty cannot be confined within the limits of any contract. What He does, or promises to do, for one, He will do for all who stand in the same relation to Him of trust and obedience. His covenants do not change his mind, nor bend his will. His covenanted mercies are only a disclosure of what his mercy *is*, only a specimen and illustration of what his uncovenanted mercies are and must be.

Hence, too, Ethan might have concluded, as we are bound to conclude, that any momentary glimpse which we can catch of God's attitude toward men reveals his constant and unchanging attitude ; that to every man who loves and trusts and serves Him He will be all that He was to David. Ethan might have concluded, we are bound to conclude, that God's promise not to destroy David's seed, even when they broke his statutes, but to correct and chasten them for their sins, without taking his mercy from them or suffering his faithfulness to fail, reveals the meaning of all the punishments that wait on sin, the mercy which tempers all his judgments.

Now this thought is so hopeful, it throws such a bright and cheerful light on the mystery of Providence, and on all that is darkest and most perplexing in human experience, that you may hesitate to commit yourself to it, lest it should betray you. If you cannot dispute this inference, this argument from the very nature of God, from his admitted unchangeableness, you may nevertheless be unable to rest in it. There may be much in the

Bible, and much in human life, which you cannot reconcile with it. And hence, though you would gladly believe that all the covenants which God has made with men are but successive revelations of his unchanging Mind toward us, gladly believe even that all the punishments which wait on sin are intended for correction and not for destruction, you cannot believe it, or cannot rest in your belief, until these difficulties are put out of your way. Let us look fairly at these difficulties then, and consider whether they offer any true impediment to the rest of faith.

(1) First, we take the Biblical difficulties. It was Ethan's recollection of God's covenant with David which made it hard for him to believe that the calamities which fell on David's seed were sent in mercy and in faithfulness. And, somewhere in the background of *your* memory, there may be lurking dim recollections of certain covenants into which God has entered with certain men that render it hard for you to believe that He is and will be equally good to men who have no covenant to plead; equally good to *you*, although you can never quite persuade yourself that you are one of the elect, and gravely doubt whether any Church has an exclusive claim to be considered the true Church. "Was not Abraham," you may ask, "elected to special favour and grace? Were not the ministers of the altar, the Hebrew clergy, the Levitical tribe, chosen to special honour, and made the authorized mediators between God and man? Were not the Israelites an elect race, with whom God entered into a communion such as no

other nation knew? And the Church—have we not the authority of Christ Himself for saying that as many as believe on Him have been chosen out of the world, separated from it, lifted high above it, sanctified or set apart unto life eternal?"

Yes, all this is true. No honest student of the Bible can deny that it contains a doctrine of election. But an election to what? To a selfish security and enjoyment, or to an unselfish service? An election for *their* sake who were elected, or for the sake of others? Read the Bible as carefully as you will, and I am bold to say that you will find no election in it which is not an election to special service as well as to special favour or grace. A man, a class, a race, may be raised above the general level for a time, but it is only that he or they may help to *raise* the general level. Abraham and his family *were* chosen to special privilege and honour. But why? That in him and in his seed all the families of the earth might be blessed. The Levitical tribe was elected to the first place in Israel, and stood nearest God. But why? Simply that they might serve their brethren, presenting their sacrifices to God, and pronouncing God's benediction on them. The Israelites were an elect race; to them pertained the sonship, the Shekinah, the covenants, the promises, the law and the service of God. But for what end were they thus honoured? Simply, if we may trust St. Paul, that, both by their acceptance and their subsequent rejection, they might contribute to the salvation of the Gentiles; simply that they might learn and teach that *in every nation* he that

feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him ; learn and teach that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him, and that *whosoever* calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved. The Church *has* been chosen out of the world ; but chosen simply that, by the Church, the world itself may be won to the love and service of truth and righteousness : the dream of all the prophets of the Church culminating in the sublime vision of an entire universe bound every way, by cords of love, to the very heart of God. In short, the Bible knows of no election, whether of few or many, which is not for the benefit of all. It records no covenant whose mercies do not point to a Mercy which no covenant can limit ; no promise which does not run up into the great promise of a redeemed and renewed race dwelling in a regained Paradise.

And, indeed, there is a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews that ought long since to have exploded this inveterate tradition about the covenanted and uncovenanted mercies of God, which attributes two different qualities of mercy to Him, mercy with, and mercy without a guarantee. For the writer of that Epistle (Heb. vi. 13-20) elaborately explains that all this apparatus of covenants and promises and oaths was intended, not to bind God, lest He should change his mind ; nor to secure special terms of grace for this man or that race ; but to animate the hearts of the elect for the great work of mediation to which they were called, to inspire them with confidence and courage

and hope. The promises of God to the few express the will of God for the many, he affirms ; for *we*, i.e. all believing men, are to be the better for the promise made to faithful Abraham. But the few must be taught to trust in that promise before the many will commit themselves to it. How, then, was this trust to be induced ? Well, men bind themselves to their engagements by formal contracts ; and so God binds Himself to Abraham. Men swear to keep their promises ; and therefore God swears, and, since He could swear by no greater, swore by Himself. To men a contract makes things sure, and an oath is a stronger guarantee than a word. Hence God, "*being minded to shew more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel,*" first entered into a covenant with them, and then confirmed that covenant by an oath ; in order that "by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie," they might feel sure of Him, cease to doubt and distrust Him, look with confidence for the fulfilment of the hopes they had based on his word.

But, of course, it is just as impossible for God to lie without a pledge as with a pledge. Promises do not make Him gracious ; they express and declare his grace. Covenants and oaths do not keep Him true ; He *is* true : but they may persuade men of his truth ; they may banish doubt, inspire confidence, confirm hope. They are condescensions to human custom, human infirmity, human needs : but they make no difference in God, or in his dealings with men : they simply reveal

the law, and the purpose, of his dealings with them. On the testimony of the Bible itself, therefore, his uncovenanted mercies are just as sure as his covenanted mercies. The only difference between the two is that the covenant makes us *feel* more sure of them.

(2) Finally, even when the Biblical difficulties are put out of our way, there is still much in the facts of human experience to hinder us from arriving at Ethan's conclusion. Take that conclusion to many, ask them to believe that God's mercy endures for ever, and that his faithfulness extends to all generations, and they will reply: "How *can* we believe it when so many facts contradict or seem to contradict it, when there is so much in human life which is neither merciful nor just? We look around us, for example, and everywhere we see a stern law of retribution at work, which exacts of every man the full penalty of his deeds; and this law is inexorably administered; it makes no allowance for human weakness, for temptation, for mistake; it never gives men a second chance and sends them back to try again, however excusably they may have failed at first. How are such facts as these to be reconciled with the theory which places an everlasting and unchanging Mercy on the throne of the universe?"

Now I am far from conceding that this is either an exact or a complete statement of the ways of God with men. It omits much; and it assumes some points which are at least open to dispute: for I, for one, am gratefully conscious that God has given me a good many second chances, and even third and fourth

chances, of retrieving errors into which I have fallen, and that He has taken much pains to bring back my feet when they have gone astray. But I admit that it is as true as most general statements are, true on the whole, true in the main; and that it needs to be met before we can sing of a Mercy which extends to every man and covers the whole of human life.

And there is but one satisfactory way of meeting it—Ethan's way. As he argued that the rod which punished the sins of David's seed was a rod of correction and not of anger and vengeance, so we must argue that even the law of retribution itself, and the inexorable severity of its administration, are revelations and proofs of the Mercy by which the world is ruled.

And who can deny the mercy of that high Will which made the law of retribution the law—or, rather one of the laws—of human life? If we are to be men and masters of our fate, and not mere puppets moved by the Hand which made us, by what kindlier and more effective discipline could we have been trained to make a wise choice and drawn into right paths than by being compelled to accept the consequences of every decision we reach, and to arrive at the end to which every path in which we walk naturally conducts? Is it not thus that, if you are wise, you train your own children for virtue? As they approach, and when they reach, years of discretion, do you not permit them, within large limits, to take their own course and to do what they will, only warning them that they must inevitably bear the results of their actions? Was any

race ever yet trained to be free, and to make a wise use of freedom, or any other plan than this? Well, as we treat our children and our fellows, so God treats us; and for the same beneficent reason,—that He may train us, by painful experience, to take and keep the paths of righteousness and peace, to love and follow only that which is good. “Take your own way by all means,” He seems to say to us; “try this path and that if you cannot take my word as to the path of life:” but He sets judgment to tread on the very heels of offence that, sooner or later, we may learn there is only one path in which it is well for us to walk.

And as for the inexorable severity with which this law of retribution is administered—though I am not prepared to admit that God has no way of comforting and even redeeming us when we suffer for our sins and follies and mistakes—yet how can we but acknowledge that it needs to be administered with an invariable and constant severity? . How else should we know what to expect? or be convinced that the ways of sin are ways of death? And who that considers himself cannot remember times at which he flattered himself that he was for ever cured of some besetting sin, and might well therefore be spared its full penalty, only to find afterwards, even when that penalty had been exacted to the uttermost farthing, that he was *not* cured, but fell into the same sin again and again? Which of us has not had sorrowfully to confess that the remission of the penalties we so much dread might be dangerous, might be injurious, both for us and for our neighbours?



Take *all* the facts of human experience then, and I think you will feel that there *is* mercy even in that law of retribution which seems most opposed to the rule of an infinite Compassion and Love. I think you may be able even to go a step beyond St. Paul, and to behold not only "the mercy *and* the severity of God," but his mercy *in* his severity. While if you believe in a work of Redemption as well as in a law of Retribution, if you believe that God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved, there is absolutely no reason why you should not sing with Ethan, of a Mercy which is being built up for ever, and of a faithfulness which is establishing itself in the all-embracing heavens.

## XIV.

### *THE DEATH OF MOSES.*

"And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy strong hand ; for what god is there, in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy mighty acts? Let me go over, I pray thee, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for ybur sakes, and hearkened not unto me : and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee ; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward : and behold with thine eyes ; for thou shalt not go over this Jordan."—DEUTERONOMY iii. 23-27.

THERE is something wonderfully pathetic in the death of Moses. Nor does its pathos at all depend on the dramatic accessories of the scene, legendary or Scriptural. Scripture tells us that he died "by the mouth of God ;" and the rabbis take this to mean that he died by "the kiss," and not by the word, of God. Josephus tells us that Moses withdrew from the camp, and began his ascent of Pisgah, amid the tears of the people, the women beating their breasts, and the children giving way to uncontrolled wailing ; that at a certain point in the ascent he made a sign to the weeping multitude to follow him no farther, taking only the elders

with him ; that at the top of the range he dismissed the elders ; and that then (having ascended the Nebo peak of the Pisgah, I suppose), as he was embracing Eliezer and Joshua, and while he was still speaking to them, a cloud overshadowed him, and he vanished, and was buried in a lofty mountain valley. The Bible tells us that, standing on one of the loftiest spurs or summits of the Pisgah range, Moses looked down on the green pastures, watered by the Jordan, immediately below him, in which the Israelite host was encamped ; and then, lifting up his eyes, gazed on one of the noblest and fairest scenes on the face of the earth. Over against the Camp, only just across the River, his eye would fall on the high walls of Jericho, standing amid its grove of palms. "Beyond was spread out the whole range of the mountains of Palestine, in its fourfold masses : 'all Gilead,' with Hermon and Lebanon in the east and north ; the hills of Galilee, overhanging the lake of Gennesareth ; the wide opening where lay the plain of Esdraelon, the future battlefield of the nations ; the rounded summits of Ebal and Gerizim ; immediately in front of him the hills of Judea, and amidst them, seen distinctly through the rents in their rocky walls, Bethlehem, on its narrow ridge, and the invincible fortress of Jebus or Jerusalem."

1. But all this, telling and picturesque as it is in itself, contributes little or nothing to the pathos of the scene. It is not this which really moves us. It is rather the simple fact that here is an old man, whose physical energies are still unimpaired—his eye not dim, nor his

natural force abated—who has to die, with his reward full in sight indeed, but ungrasped, untouched, although it is the strongest desire of his heart to go up into the good land to reach which he has borne so much and achieved so much. It is not the debt of nature which he is paying. It is not that life is not long enough to admit of his entering on the reward for which he has endured so many toils, so many sacrifices. His life would be long enough were it permitted to run to its natural close. He dies “by the mouth,” or, as we might say, “by the visitation” of God, and not under the burden of accumulated infirmities. He is snatched away from his reward when it is well within his reach, and while he is still capable of grasping and enjoying it.

That, surely, is pathetic enough: but it grows still more pathetic when we remember the character of the man. The sacred historian (Numbers xii. 3) sums up his character in the words, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth.” But our English phrase, “the meekest of men,” hardly renders the full force of the Hebrew, which implies that he was the most enduring, the most disinterested, the most *unselfish*, of men, the most ready to efface and sacrifice himself for the sake of others. And what was his whole life but an illustration of that inspired summary? The son of Pharaoh’s daughter, he flung himself into the cause of Pharaoh’s slaves. When called to be their leader and deliverer, he earnestly besought God that Aaron should be preferred before himself or, indeed, any other man who had the gifts and capacities

for that difficult but honourable post which he could not persuade himself that he possessed. More than once, when Jehovah offered to build up a great nation out of Moses' seed, if only he would consent to the destruction of Israel, he prayed that his name might be blotted out if only Israel were spared. And now, when the toils and perils of the way are over, this meek unselfish hero, whose heart had well-nigh broken again and again under the weight of the greatest enterprise ever achieved by mortal man, is denied even the poor reward of setting foot in the land to reach which had been the goal of all his endeavours and of all his hopes for more than forty years! He may see it with his eyes, but he must not pass over its threshold.

And why—why was this hard measure dealt out to him? Simply because he once lost patience with the people whom he had often proved that he loved better than his own soul, as we might infer from the many allusions to the waters of Meribah (Cf. Deut. xxxii. 48–52)? or simply because, as we are told in the text, the Lord was wroth with him for the sake of Israel, because of their constant mutiny and rebellion against God? It is impossible to believe it, if for no other reason yet for this: that if Moses once lost patience with them, and cried out angrily, "Hear now, ye rebels, shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?" Jehovah Himself lost patience with them more than once, and threatened to destroy them. It is very true, indeed, that when a man sins against his own character, and fails at the point in which he is specially strong, his sin often breeds

consequences which seem out of all proportion to his offence. And it is also true that one man often suffers for the sins of others, the greatest suffering for the least, and the best for the worst. But are there no compensations in the providence of God for these vicarious sufferings? And if a man, by failing in his proper virtue, brings on himself a heavy and disproportionate punishment, is he not to reap the large and happy consequences of the innumerable acts by which he made that virtue habitual to him? If God be just, the unselfishness which prompts men to suffer in and for the sins of others *must* have its reward; men *must* receive the recompense of the good, as well as of the ill, they do. And hence, as Moses was not serving an unjust and austere Master, we may be sure that if he was not suffered to set foot in "the good land," if his prayer that he might go over this Jordan was denied, whether for his own sin or the sin of Israel, some better thing was prepared for him, some larger and more satisfying reward, even though we cannot see what it was.

But is there, after all, any real difficulty in seeing what it was? If Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, by the constant defeat of the hopes which they had built on the promise of God, were taught to look for a better country than the land which flowed with milk and honey, even a heavenly, why should not Moses learn, by the selfsame discipline, to cherish the selfsame expectation and hope? He was not a sinner above all men, nor above all Jews, that that should be denied to him which

was conceded to them. He was a better, as well as a greater, man than any of the Israelites who did go over the Jordan, better even than Caleb and Joshua, the best of them. Must he not, then, have had a better reward, a better country reserved for him? Can we compare what befell him with that which befell them without being set on asking: Which, then, is the true land of promise? that on which they entered when they passed through Jordan, or that in which he entered when he passed over, rather than through, the stream of death? Why, even the old Jewish commentators, when dealing with the opening phrase of Jehovah's answer to Moses' prayer (Ver. 26), "*Let it suffice thee*, speak no more unto me of this matter," take it to mean, "*Far more than that thou shouldest go over Jordan is reserved for thee; plentiful goodness is hidden from thee.*" And cannot we, with the New Testament before us, frame at least some faint conception of what that "far more," that "plentiful goodness," was? Did not Moses, as well as Elijah, leave his home in the heavenly country to confer with the Saviour of mankind on "the exodus," the still greater exodus, which He was to achieve?

The death of Moses on the peak of Nebo was not simply a punishment, then; it was also, and mainly, a reward: it was not a defeat, but a triumph. His prayer, that he might go over Jordan, was not denied, but granted and transcended, unless to grant a larger answer to prayer than we can ask or conceive be to deny or refuse our petitions. What he wanted to go over Jordan for was, as he himself tells us, that he might see more of

the mighty acts of God which, as he felt, he was only just beginning to understand? And was there any place where he would see so many of those mighty acts, or understand them so well, as that city and home of the soul which we call Heaven?

There is a noble illustration here of the true function and power of prayer, an illustration which casts a very clear and helpful light on that mystery of prayer by which we are often perplexed. For the example of Moses shews us how God often answers by refusing our petitions, granting us the true and deepest desire of our hearts by passing by the poor imperfect interpretation of that desire which is all that we can reach, whether in our words or even in our thoughts. But I must not dwell on this lesson, inviting as it is; but, rather, ask your attention to the moral commonly drawn from the death of Moses—a moral which, as I conceive, is woefully misleading and incomplete, and which therefore I must beg you to revise and correct.

2. Much, far too much, has been made of the pathos of Moses' death. Every remarkable literary allusion to it is charged with the pathetic tone of men who see "the pity of it, O, the pity of it," but see nothing else: nor do I know of any sermon on it, or any commentary which so much as glances at the many considerations which relieve the sadness of it, and even convert that sadness into a theme of joy and triumph. Now, as I have admitted, from the common point of view, and so long as we confine our thoughts within the narrow bounds of time and sense, it is one of the most pathetic scenes ever



enacted. Nor, view it how we will, shall we ever discharge all pathos from it ; for, so long as we are men, the spectacle of a great man taken away from an unfinished work, and before he can enter into his reward, must always touch and move our hearts. But if, instead of confining our view of it to a single aspect, we look at the fact all round, we shall find much in it to temper the sadness with which we regard it ; while if we bend eyes of faith on it, the pathetic mist through which we commonly view it is all suffused with the bright and radiant hues of hope. For then we can see that a man's work in this world does not cease and determine so soon as he leaves the world ; that his work still goes on, though in other hands ; that the results of that work follow him into the higher world into which he has passed ; and that the doer of the work is raised to loftier tasks and a larger reward in the world which is still to come for us, but *has* come for him.

Now these are thoughts, or facts, which enable us to correct many of our common judgments, and even to correct the judgments of men much wiser than ourselves to whom they have not occurred, or have not occurred in connection with the theme in hand. For example, both Cowley and Macaulay compare Lord Bacon—who did so much to induce men to replace the barren speculations of philosophy with the verified conclusions of science, yet did not live to see the result of his labours—to Moses dying on Mount Pisgah, with that good land in view on which he was not permitted to set his foot. As we study his work—the first book

of the *Novum Organon* especially—says the great Essayist, “we see the great Lawgiver looking round from his lonely elevation on an infinite expanse; behind him a wilderness of dreary sands and bitter waters in which successive generations have sojourned, always moving, yet never advancing, reaping no harvest, and building no abiding city: before him a goodly land, a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. While the multitude below saw only the flat, sterile desert in which they had so long wandered, bounded on every side by a near horizon, or diversified only by some deceitful mirage, he was gazing from a far higher stand on a far lovelier country, following with his eye the long course of fertilizing rivers, through ample pastures, and under the bridges of great capitals, measuring the distance of marts and havens, and portioning out all these wealthy regions from Dan to Beersheba.” As became a poet, Cowley had compressed the same thought into fewer words, and added that pathetic note which Macaulay missed. He described Bacon as one who

Did on the very border stand  
Of the blessed Promised Land;  
And from the mountain top of his exalted wit  
Saw it himself, and shew'd us it:  
*But life did never to one man allow  
Time to discover worlds and conquer too.*

And Dean Stanley,<sup>1</sup> in quoting these words, generalizes their moral, and affirms that they may be applied with

<sup>1</sup> Stanley's *Jewish Church*. Part I. page 200.

equal truth to the career of all great men, whether they have achieved greatness in the realm of pure thought, or as reformers, martyrs, or missionaries of the Church. "To labour and not to see the end of our labours; to sow and not to reap; to be removed from this earthly scene before our work has been appreciated, and when it will be carried on not by ourselves, but by others—is a law so common in the highest characters of history, that none can be said to be altogether exempt from its operation."

Yet, surely, this pensive reflection on the limitations of mortal greatness should not be the only, nor the chief, moral we draw from the death of Moses; and cannot be, if we bring to bear on it either that faculty in us which looks before and after, or that still higher faculty which gives substance to things hoped for and proof of things not seen. For what, after all, do the Dean's pathetic sentences come to but this: that the men who, in any province of thought or action, are before their time, are not appreciated by the time which lags behind them, but must pass away, pass through the glorifying ministry of death, before they are appraised at their true value, and honoured up to their worth? Yet who does not know that these are precisely the men whom after ages delight to honour, and who are held in everlasting remembrance? And who that is capable of any pure and sacred ambition would not infinitely prefer the pure and enduring fame which they command to the noisy and vulgar popularity of the hour?

To speak of their lot in terms which imply or suggest

it to be the most tragic and pathetic which can befall the sons of men is to forget the dignity of all true and noble toil, and to sin at once against reason and against faith. Against reason: for (1) who does not feel that their fate is a most happy one as compared with that of those who either have no great work to do, or are incapable of doing it, who have no fair and large opportunity of serving their fellows, or who cannot rise to it when it comes? Who does not feel that, die when they will, *their* life mounts to a triumphant close as compared with that of reformers or statesmen, or any of those "ruling persons" of whom many have taken refuge in England of late years, whose work is done, or is snatched away from them, long *before* their life comes to a close, who outstay their welcome, outlive their reputation, lag superfluous on the stage, and at last sink, belated, into the grave, unhonoured, unwept, unsung, with a cloud hanging over their memory which no kind hand can lift or disperse?

And (2) if it be true—as surely it is true—that

The sun, the moon, the stars  
Send no such light upon the ways of men  
As one great deed;

if it be true of those who do such deeds that

Their examples reach a hand  
Far thro' all years, and everywhere they meet  
And kindle generous purpose, and the strength  
To mould it into action pure as theirs,

it is plain that the great men taken from us, prema-

turally, as we think, so far from having ceased from their labours, *even in this world*, as we thoughtlessly assume, may be doing far more in and for the world now that they have passed out of it than while they were still in it. As, indeed, is demonstrably true of Moses. For large and heroic as was the service he rendered to Israel, and through Israel to the world, while he wore flesh about him, it was as nothing compared with the influence he is exerting on the present generation. It is forty centuries since he was buried in the grave of which no man knew or knows ; and yet he is alive, active, at work in and upon the world, to this day ; doing more for men than ever, not only by the inspiration of his historic life and example, but also by the direct and incalculable effects of his legislation and teaching. His ten commandments are inscribed in our very statute books as well as on the walls of our Churches ; and his great words and deeds " shed light on the ways of men " in all Mahommedan as well as in all Christian lands.

And if it is a sin against reason to think only of the pathos of Moses' death, forgetting his growing and enduring triumph over death, it is no less a sin against faith to speak of him simply as taken from an unfinished work, and as missing his reward. For if he did not pass over the Jordan, and set foot in the land which a greater than Moses has made dear and sacred even to us, faith assures us that he rose into that better country of which even the land of promise was but a faint and partial type. If his work on earth was carried on by other hands than his, yet faith assures us that all the happy

consequences of that work followed him, and still do follow him, into his new and better estate. And when we see one great man after another called away before his work seems to be done, or before it is duly appreciated, or before he can reap its full reward, we shall only prove our own faithlessness if we think only of what he has lost, and not of that which he has gained. What if he has gone to the world in which every man is accurately, and yet most generously, rewarded according to his work, and in which he enjoys all the happy consequences of that work which are still unfolding themselves in the world he has left? The God of recompenses will not fail to recompense *him*; nor will He suffer any good work, any noble enterprise, which he has commenced to fail for want of some Joshua to carry it on,—some Joshua who ought perhaps to have *his* chance and turn as well as Moses.

We must not speak “in mournful numbers,” then, of those who are taken from their work here as if that were the whole of the story: for they are taken to higher work elsewhere; and even their work here will be completed in God’s good time and way, by ministers whom they have trained and He will move and inspire. And what though one man sow and another reap, if both he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together at the last?

If, therefore, we have thought the ways of God unequal with the great men and the great thinkers of our race, if we have, at least in this conspicuous and crucial instance, seen cause to doubt or distrust his providence,

that can only be because our view has been confined within "near horizons," because we have not looked on to the final issues of human life and conduct. Let us but lift faith-couched, and faith-invigorated eyes on "the distant scene" as well as the near, and we shall discover that they do not in anywise miss their reward ; we shall confess that "far more has been reserved for them" than either they or we were able to conceive, and shall rejoice in the "plentiful goodness" which was "hidden" from them and from us. For those who have been permitted to do a great and enduring work in this world, and have then been translated to the loftier tasks and ampler service of the better world, are so far from losing their reward, that they receive a double and all-transcending reward.

3. Now it is much to have gained a point of view from which we can vindicate the ways of God with great men, and see the goodness in what seems the severity of his providence. But though it is a great satisfaction to us to learn that those who had long and strenuously pursued a lofty ideal, and who appear to us to have been cut off while their work was still unfinished, or unappreciated, or unrewarded, have nevertheless received an appreciation and a reward which transcends not their deserts alone, but their very desires, you may be sure that I should not have endeavoured to give you this point of view if it had not its lesson of hope, its inspiration and promise, for those who cannot be reckoned among the great ones of the earth. However humble his career may be, however slender his opportunities,

however few his gifts, every man, in his quiet and retired hours, frames some conception, some ideal, of what he ought to be, of what he would like to be and do. The lofty dreams and aspirations of youth, the fine hopes and resolves we cherish when we first grow conscious that a real spiritual life has been quickened within us, and even the fair and unapproachable Pattern of all virtue and goodness which the Christian saint has ever before him, are but instances and illustrations of this tendency toward the ideal, this habit of framing some conception of an excellence which transcends our present reach, and may transcend all mortal reach, but which nevertheless we must aim at and pursue. And unless we have suffered—

The hardening of the heart that brings  
Irreverence for the dreams of youth ;

unless we have permitted the appetites of the flesh, or the cares and toils and defeats of this life, to override and suppress all that we once held to be most noble and fair and precious, we cannot but feel, with shame and sadness, how far we still are from the ideals of life and goodness which we were able to frame years and years ago, and which did not seem so far off then perhaps as they seem now.

So, again, while every man frames some ideal for himself, to attain which he feels to be the main task, the great work, of his life, every reflective man also frames an ideal for each of his neighbours whom he knows at all well and loves with any sincerity. He may



see their faults and defects, indeed ; if he is a man of any wisdom and experience, he cannot but see and lament them. But he also sees their virtues, their gifts, and the possibilities which lie before them, and knows how lovely and perfect in different ways they may become if only they are true to that which is best and highest in their nature.

And yet how often, how constantly, how profoundly, we are disappointed in ourselves, and in our neighbours, and that to the very end. Good as *they* are, and much as *we* love a goodness we never quite attain, we and they pass hence with our ideals still unrealized, with the main work of our life not half done. Was it pathetic that Moses should die with his work still unfinished, and Israel not half redeemed? The pathos of his death is a pathos of which the world is full. We all die with characters still imperfect, with our work not half done, even when measured by such poor ideals of work and character as we ourselves are able to frame ; never becoming what we would be, never seeing even the best of our neighbours becoming what we know they have it in them to be.

We might dwell, we are often tempted to dwell, on that pathetic fact till we have lost all courage and hope whether for ourselves or for the world. But here the lesson of Moses' death steps in to inspire us with courage and hope. For it teaches us that the ideals of character and work which we frame are *prophetic* ; that they are the voice of God in the soul, predicting what we *shall* be and do ; predicting also that that work of redemption.

on which we have set our hearts, the redemption of our humanity and of humanity at large from the bondage of sin and infirmity and incompleteness, is the work of God, and must therefore be carried to a triumphant close. Moses does not enter the promised land ; but it is that he may enter the true land of promise, which is also the land of fulfilment, and in which the inner and ideal man of the heart may unfold into new vigour under larger and happier conditions. He has to leave behind him an unfinished work ; but that work is taken up by Joshua, by the Judges, by the Kings, by a long succession of prophets, by Christ Himself and all his servants ; and when at last the work is complete, Moses will not be forgotten : for the song of triumph which hails its completion is to be the song of Moses as well as of the Lamb.

And so, dear brethren, it will be with us, if we cherish a Christian ideal of character, if we are in any measure true to the inward man of the heart, if we are followers of those who through faith and patience now inherit the promises. We may never quite beat our music out here ; but we *shall* get it out at last, when we are taken up into the world of harmony and peace. We shall never see perfection here, whether in ourselves or in others ; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. We must not expect to receive the reward even of the little good we do before we pass through those " doors of Night " which are also " the gates of Light ; " like Moses, we may only see and greet it from afar, though we may have longed for it as he

longed to enter "those holy fields" which the feet of One greater than Moses have made for ever sacred and dear. But if that should be so with us, it will be so only because God has reserved some better thing for us than we can conceive or desire. For God has many strange ways of rewarding his servants, and among them this: that He bestows on them a grace which, even to them themselves, may seem to be a punishment—as, no doubt, his sentence of death seemed to Moses, until he learned that death meant "more life and fuller."

There is a pretty legend to the effect that, on the first Christmas eve, one of the shepherds of Bethlehem, instead of going out into the fields to keep watch over the flocks by night, sat by the bed of a stranger whom he had taken into his cottage as a guest, nursing him through a fever of which he was sick, and so missed "the vision of angels" which to any pious Jew, waiting for the consolation of Israel, would have been a full reward for a lifetime of faithful service. No glory of the Lord shone round *him*; no heavenly music, no tidings of great joy, fell on his ear. And, of course, some of his neighbours thought he must have been guilty of some strange sin which rendered him unworthy of the great sight vouchsafed to his brethren. And how that harsh judgment was confirmed when he fell sick of the fever and died before he could hear the wondrous tale of Messiah's birth, you can easily imagine for yourselves. But did he, therefore, lose the reward of his humane and kindly deed? Listen, and you shall hear.

Shemuel the Bethlehemite  
Watched a fevered guest at night ;  
All his fellows fared afield,  
Saw the angel host revealed :  
He nor caught the mystic story,  
Heard the song, nor saw the glory.

Through the night they gazing stood,  
Heard the holy multitude ;  
Back they came in wonder home,  
Knew the Christmas kingdom come,  
Eyes aflame, and hearts elated :  
Shemuel sat alone, and waited.

Works of mercy now, as then,  
Hide the angel host from men ;  
Hearts atune to earthly love  
Miss the angel-notes above ;  
Deeds at which the world rejoices  
Quench the sound of angel voices.

So they thought, nor deemed from whence  
His celestial recompence.  
Shemuel, by the fever bed,  
Touched by beckoning hands that led,  
Died, *and saw the Uncreated* :  
All his fellows lived and—waited.

In other words, the kind shepherd who, by his charity, lost not only the vision which he would have given his life to enjoy, but also life itself, entered into the heavenly country *earlier* than his fellows who seemed so much more favoured than himself, passed through death into life eternal, and was taken up—not simply to hear, but—to join in the angelic song. He, like Moses, had both his earthly reward and his celestial recompense : for his kind deed “sends light upon the ways of men” to this day — is it not even now touching and warming our

hearts? — and “he saw the Uncreated,” saw the God whose love and grace Christ came to reveal.

Let us lay the lesson of this pretty legend to heart. Moses and his work may seem too far above us that we should hope to share in his reward. But Shemuel, the simple shepherd of the Syrian plain, is not so far above us that we need despair of doing some kind deed like his. And if we should, if we make any sincere and earnest endeavour to serve God in serving our fellows, we may be very sure that, even if we should miss his earthly reward, not living on the lips of men, we shall not miss his “celestial recompence.” For has not the Master Himself taught us that if we give so much as a cup of cold water to one of his disciples, if we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, He will take our service as service done to Him, pronounce his benediction upon us, and welcome us to his eternal home and blessedness, on the day when the dead, small and great, shall stand before Him?

## XV.

### *THE CHRISTIAN RACE.*

“Wherefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin by which we are surrounded ; and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured a cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—HEBREWS xii. 1, 2.

THERE can be no doubt that this passage is, in the main, an exhortation to that stedfast pursuit of the Christian ideal to which we are all bound by our upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Nor is there any doubt that its leading image is that of a race such as the athletes of classical times used to run ; and in which they contended not for their own honour alone, and still less for their own profit, but for the honour of the school, the city, or the stem, to which they severally belonged. And from one clause in the passage it would seem probable that the race in the Writer's mind was one of those that were run in the vast Roman amphitheatres, in which the spectators sat in seats that rose tier above tier, so that to the runners, swiftly flashing by, their white faces and many-coloured robes would look like an illuminated “cloud” stooping from the sky.

So far all is plain : but the moment we look more closely into the passage our difficulties begin, partly because it is so heavily weighted with meaning, and partly because the true meaning of some of its words and phrases is hard to determine. Taking its clauses in the order of time, it teaches us (1) How we are to *prepare* for the Christian race ; *viz.* By stripping off every encumbrance and renouncing every sin : (2) How we are to *run* the race ; *viz.* With patient endurance, with a cheerful constancy and resolution : (3) Where we are to glance for *encouragement* while we run ; *viz.* To the example and testimony of the great cloud of witnesses who ran the selfsame race before us : and (4) How we are to *win* the race ; *viz.* By looking steadfastly and running steadfastly to Jesus, the Judge and Umpire, who *is* the Judge because He Himself has been far and away the best runner in this race, and has won the noblest victory.

Even so far as this, all is plain ; and indeed, so long as we confine ourselves to general terms, all the critics and commentators are of one mind, and we may so choose our terms as to carry them all with us. It is only when we examine the passage clause by clause, word by word, and try to get a more exact and definite meaning, that they begin to differ ; and by their differences charge the passage, for the wise, with a wider, deeper, and more manifold significance. Let us glance — and we can do little more — at each of these four points, then, and see what they have to teach us.

1. How are we to prepare ourselves for the Christian

race? By "*laying*" or putting "*aside*," by stripping off, by getting quit of, "*every weight*," or, better, "*all encumbrance*," all that would hinder and impede us, "and the *sin that surrounds us*," or, as the English Version has it, "the sin that doth so easily beset us."

The first of these phrases is comparatively simple; though, even here, some tell us that the encumbrance of which we are to be rid is that superfluous weight of flesh which can only be reduced by severe training, while others tell us that it is only the long flowing garments which, unless we doff them, will make it impossible for us to put on pace, and may even trip us up. But is not "all encumbrance" large enough to include both these meanings? May we not be sure that just as the athlete would prepare for a race both by a training which would remove every ounce of superfluous flesh, and by stripping off the long heavy robes which would impede his stride, so, in making ourselves ready for the service of Christ, we must renounce whatever, either in our inner nature or our outward habits, would unfit us for that service or prove a hindrance in it? Take both meanings by all means; for even then you will be far from having exhausted the significance of these two pregnant words. "Every weight," "all encumbrance," cannot mean less than this,—that we are to lay aside *whatever* impedes us, whatever would hamper or delay us, from whatever cause, in whatever way.

But the second clause is more difficult, though it looks so easy. For what, we may ask, can "the sin that doth so easily beset us" be but our most besetting sin,



the sin to which we are most inclined by our personal make, temperament, habit, and into whose hindering and degrading clutches we are most apt to fall? And to that question there would be no reply did our English Version accurately represent the Original. But it does not, as you may infer from the Marginal alternatives—"doth closely cling to us," and "is admired of many." The simple fact is that our eight words, "the sin that doth most easily beset us" are a translation, or a paraphrase, of only three Greek words, which might be literally rendered by "the *circumambient* sin." But if that rendering would carry any sense at all to the ordinary reader, it certainly would not carry half the meaning of the Inspired Writer. What he meant to convey was that, in addition to all other encumbrances, all else which is adverse to the Christian life, we must lay aside the ruling sin of the age, the sin which is in the very air of the time, which besets or surrounds us like an atmosphere; the sin which, as everybody shares it, we may half persuade ourselves is not a sin at all, or is not a sin so deadly that it need be very strenuously opposed or renounced.

Nay, there is a still finer and more individualizing shade of meaning in this rare epithet. It is a *popular* sin which the inspired Writer has in his eye, a sin which will win for us the sympathy and *admiration* of many foolish bystanders; a sin, therefore, which we may foolishly suppose will aid, rather than hinder, us in the race we have to run; a sin which will conciliate our neighbours, lead them to wish us well, and perchance to go a little way with us.

Probably the sin which he had specially in view at the moment, since it was the sin to which the weaker disciples of Christ in his time were most exposed, was that fear of persecution, that shrinking from "the reproach of Christ," that dread of having life, and therefore usefulness, brought to a sudden and premature close, against which he had already warned his readers. And cannot you understand how, in that age, even a good man could go far to persuade himself that he might be a true servant of Christ even though he shrank from a public profession of faith in his Name; yes, and even though, to please his neighbours, he cast a pinch of incense on Cæsar's altar? He might be doing much good in a quiet way, exercising a pure and salutary influence on many by breathing the spirit of Christ in his intercourse and traffic with his fellows. He might even be secretly reading a Christian scripture with them, and gradually disposing them to receive the Faith that was everywhere spoken against. Was he to put an end to all this by thrusting himself forward, by attracting the attention of the magistrates, by seeming to be a traitor to Cæsar, and a rebel against the public law, when he was really a loyal and obedient subject? Even if it were a sin to shrink into silence, and thus to retain the sympathy of his neighbours and the protection of the magistrates, was it not a very pardonable sin, a very common sin, and even a sin which promised large scope for future service and usefulness? Was it not better to yield to the popular pressure than to take up an attitude his real reasons for taking which his neighbours would never understand?

These common and admired sins of the time, sins which we can readily excuse to ourselves, which make men, in some sense, think better of us and associate with us on easier terms, which at all events gain for us a more peaceful and quiet life, are among the most dangerous, because the most subtle and plausible, sins ; they are among the most fatal hindrances to our advance in the spiritual life ; and the temptations to them offer us our noblest opportunities for serving God and man. And these sins are as active, as potent, as fatal, to-day as they ever were. Are there not many good men in Ireland for instance—to take a very gross and palpable illustration—who disapprove of boycotting, maiming cattle, moonlight raids and murder, but who nevertheless find it very hard to make an open and determined stand against those popular crimes, to denounce them and help to bring the offenders to justice ? And here, at home, are there not young men among us who, when with their fellows, permit themselves to listen to or make a jest on virtue and religion, or at least pretend to enjoy such jests, not because they do not believe in religion and virtue, but out of vanity and a desire to stand well with their companions ? Are there no members of our Churches who, when they travel on business or pleasure, take some pains to conceal their Christian character and profession from those whom they meet, lest they should be smiled at as “pious” or looked down upon as “vulgar Dissenters”—none, even, who at times allow themselves indulgences which they would blush to have known by those who know them best ? Are there no ministers in our

pulpits who carefully abstain from publishing precious truths of which they are fully convinced, lest, these truths proving unwelcome to their hearers, "a career of usefulness should be brought to an end"? And, in our pews, are there none who occasionally affect a scepticism which they flatter themselves will be taken as a proof of intelligence and culture, or even *cherish* an obscure feeling of doubt which would soon pass were they to define and bring it to the light?

These are among the sins of the time, popular sins, sins which are lightly excused, and may even win the sympathy and admiration of those who are not wisely and strongly good; but damning sins nevertheless, sins which every clear conscience condemns, sins which are fatal to all progress in true thinking and godly living. Every man who would honestly run the Christian race, so run as to obtain, must renounce them. No man who looks stedfastly to Jesus the Judge, no man who even turns an eye on the great cloud of witnesses, every one of whom endured fiery trials in resisting these sins, can hope to finish his course with joy if he yield to them and encumber himself with them.

II. For if we ask, How are we to *run* this race? the answer is, With "*patient endurance*," with cheerful constancy, with a resolute and ever-renewed exertion of our whole strength, with an unflagging and whole-hearted devotion which will shrink from no trial, succumb to no temptation. It is not enough that we make a good start, or that we run so long as we are fresh and head the flight; we must run on when we are weary, when our

breath fails us, when we are left behind, and even when we have lost all hope of the prize ; since patience often makes up for lack of strength or swiftness, and a cheerful courage often gives new strength. We must not shrink from any toil, any effort, nor let any inward desire for ease, or rest, or applause, prevail over our resolve to run straight onward, to endure all hardship—for to conquer without effort is to triumph without honour ; nor must we suffer ourselves so to lose heart as to relax the strain. In one of his most graphic passages St. Paul, using the images both of the racing path and the pugilistic arena, describes the spirit in which *he* both fought and ran and by which all ought to be animated who contend for the prize (1 Cor. ix. 24-27). " Know ye not that they who run in a race, all run, but only one taketh the prize ? So run that ye may secure it . . . Now they run that they may take a corruptible crown," a pine-wreath plucked from some neighbouring grove ; " but we an incorruptible : " and therefore we should be more resolute and strenuous than they. "*I, then, do so run, not as one with an uncertain aim ; I so box, not as one who plants his blows in the air ; but I bruise my body* (for the flesh, with its foolish cravings and lusts, was his antagonist) *black and blue, and lead it a slave in bonds, lest, after playing the herald to others (i.e. calling them to the games), I myself should turn out unproved,*" untrained, incompetent, unable to bear the strain of long-continued exertion and conflict.

Let me specially commend this call to patient endurance, to a resolute and cheerful constancy, to those

younger disciples of Christ who are comparatively unversed in the Christian life. That life is a pursuit, the pursuit of an ideal, and must be vigorously and untiringly maintained. You have enlisted ; you have "professed" Christ ; you have gained some knowledge of the truth as it is in Him, and some mastery over your own inclinations, and tempers, and passions ; you have done, or attempted, some good works. And so far well ; you have made a fair start : but, whatever else you do, whatever other mistake you make, do not fall into the too common error of mistaking the starting for the winning post. The course, haply a long and weary one, still lies before you. Your life, if it is to be a true life, must be a constant progress, a continuous effort, dominated by a single great aim. If you think you already know all you need to know, that you are doing all that can ever be expected of you, that there is no more need for study and exertion, courage and self-sacrifice, you are making a fatal mistake ; you are falling into one of those popular and common sins against life which you have just been warned to lay aside. You have still much to learn both of truth and duty. And, above all, you have to learn patience and endurance. The course is long and hard. You will often trip, and sometimes fall. There will be times when the Judge will seem very far off, if not invisible ; when the very witnesses will seem to have no word of comfort or encouragement for you, or none that you can take. Your strength will turn to weakness. Your breath will sob and pant, your knees tremble, your heart faint,

your feet stumble. You will have to part from many who once ran by your side, and whose presence and sympathy were a most welcome stimulus to exertion. You will have to offend many by pressing on before them, by a fidelity to conviction, a loyalty to Christ which they cannot emulate; nay, by a fidelity which to them will look like infidelity, a loyalty which will seem disloyal. And through all hindrances, all weaknesses, all losses and discouragements, you will have to persevere, to shew a cheerful courage, to hold fast your confidence and your hope.

Are you prepared for all this? Is *this* the course you have marked out for yourselves, or recognized as marked out for you? and are you running in it—resolute to learn all you can of the truth as it is in Jesus, and to do all you can for Him? Are *you* running not as those who have an uncertain and divided aim? Are you beating your body black and blue, restraining and punishing the lusts and cravings of the flesh? Have you not only laid aside what would hinder you in starting, but also what would hinder you in running—all your natural fears and misgivings even lest you should come short of your aim because you flag now and then, or because you cannot feel sure that God means you to win, or because you sometimes doubt whether, if you win, all your desires will be satisfied?

*This* is what is demanded of you. This is that to which you pledged yourselves when you gave yourselves to the service of Christ. And if you will compare your lives, or even your aims, with this high standard, you

cannot but feel how far you have fallen short of it, how deeply you stand in need of all help and of every encouragement you can get.

III. Let us mark, then, that in running this race, we are *encouraged* by the example and testimony of a great cloud of witnesses. For the writer of this Epistle the cloud of witnesses was composed of the heroic men and women whose famous achievements he had summarized in the previous Chapter, from the father of the faithful downward. But in what sense are they witnesses? Are they simply, as some say, the interested and approving spectators of our exploits? Or are they rather, as others affirm, witnesses and martyrs to the truth and to the God in whom we believe, witnesses in whose lives we may see our own experiences reflected, and from whose lips we may gather consolation and encouragement? *How* does their presence help us? By stimulating us to a keener emulation, a braver effort, a stronger determination to win, because they are looking on; or by furnishing us with guidance, counsel, courage, hope, as we remember how much they endured, what perils and defects they surmounted, and how gloriously they conquered at last and how richly they were rewarded?

If we must choose between these two interpretations—witnesses of our conduct and witnesses to the truth—let us by all means choose the latter; for mere emulation, the desire to surpass our rivals and to shine in the eyes of onlookers, is neither a very noble nor a very Christian motive; nor will it aid and encourage us in the strife as will the inspiration we draw from the



memory of those who went before us ; who had the same encumbrances to throw off, the same trials, difficulties, and temptations to face ; and who, though they were often as sore beset as we can be, as weary, as faint of heart, nevertheless finished their course with joy and now wear the crown of victory.

But why should we choose between them ? Why should we not accept both motives, in so far as they are good and helpful motives ? There is always more in any Scripture than we can see in it, however much we see. And if it will help us to remember that a great cloud of witnesses "holds us in full survey," that they are watching us with the keenest sympathy and interest, mourning over our lapses and relapses, rejoicing in our progress, our endurance, our courage and hopefulness, let us take all the help that thought will yield. If it will help us still more to remember how many have run the same race before us and to study their examples, to learn how they retrieved their errors, conquered their defects, recovered themselves when they had stumbled and fallen, were sustained under all their infirmities, mistakes, disappointments, and brought back from all their transgressions ; if, I say, their testimony to the faithfulness, compassion, and bounty of God will aid us, let us take this help too, and use it to the full ; for all things are ours, all motives, aids, encouragements, to that strenuous and continuous effort by which alone we can rise unto the life eternal and receive its crown.

"Lives of great men all remind us" how we may make our life useful and good, if not sublime. And hence

there is no kind of reading, I think, by which we profit more than the biographies of men who were genuinely or greatly good—such biographies, for instance, as those of Wesley and Arnold, Stanley and Kingsley and Maurice, Faraday and Clerk-Maxwell, Amiel and Ozanam, or even those of Macaulay and Charles Lamb ; or, if we wish for more heroic examples, the lives of Tyndale, Luther, Bunyan, Baxter, of St. Philip de Neri, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis of Assissi, SS. Bernard, Augustine, Chrysostom, Jerome. But of all biographies those which are the most helpful to us are those which we find in the Bible, when once we have learned that the men whose lives are recorded there were men of like passions with ourselves, and that their faults and sins are recorded for our warning and instruction, not that we may justify them or allow ourselves in them : for these biographies were written by men who had a special eye for the trials of faith and the triumphs of righteousness.

If, for example, you are called to walk as in darkness, by faith and not by sight, to take a way you know not, to confront dangers and make sacrifices for which your own strength is not sufficient, has Abraham nothing to say to you on the blessedness of those who cannot see and yet believe in the mysterious grace by which God perfects his strength in our weakness, transmutes faith into righteousness, as well as counts it for righteousness, shapes our most rough-hewn ends for us, and provides for all our wants ? If you feel only too keenly that you possess no rare and eminent gifts, no originality, no great force of character, and fear, therefore, that you may be

overlooked or set down as of little value, has Isaac nothing to say to you of the Wisdom and the Mercy which recognize in a meek and quiet spirit a pearl of great price, and can light up even the most ordinary and inadvertent life as with the tranquil splendours of a summer evening's calm? If you are conscious of some strange defect of nature, some subtle but potent bias which mars your character by blending selfish and worldly aims with your most religious aspirations and desires, has Jacob nothing to say to you of the Love and Grace which can purge the soul of these evil bents, and evolve from your very faults and defects a discipline by which these worldly and selfish cravings shall be chastened and expelled, and the harmony of the soul be restored? Even if you fall into open and gross transgressions which dishonour the Faith you profess, give the lie to your deepest convictions and most cherished aims, strike a discord sheer down into the very ground-tones of your spiritual life, has David nothing to say to you of a penitence which penetrates and chastises, and then revives and restores, the soul which is really athirst for God, and of the pure forgiving Love which softens and cleanses the heart, and lifts it above all the lures of sense and sin?

Ah, there is no one of this great company of witnesses who has not something to say to us which it behoves us to hear, which will adapt itself to every changing mood of the soul, bringing us the very rebuke, comfort, or incitement of which we are most in need!

And if we may be sure that men so remote from us,

in many ways, as these heroes of the antique Hebrew world, watch us as we walk or run, and speak hope and encouragement to us in the most critical emergencies of our career, can any of you tell me why we may not believe that those whom we loved and still love, though we fancy that we have lost their presence and sympathy for a while, should not also be among the spectators who look down with love and interest upon us from their high seats, and still minister comfort and help to us in ways we cannot fathom? May we not, must we not, believe that at least in this sense, they too are still with us, still conscious of, still affected by, all we feel and do? Ought we not to run our race with new vigour, and new ardour, because we know that they are saddened when we slip or faint, and share the joy of our every advance in thought and holiness; because we know that every forward step brings us nearer to *them*, as well as nearer to the Lord and Judge with whom they sit and mark how we run?

IV. If we ask, How may we *win*? how may we best *assure* ourselves of winning this race, of ultimately obtaining that perfect ideal of character which has been set before us? the answer is: By "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured a cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In the Imperial games the goal was placed in front of the Emperor's seat. And the image of this verse seems to be that that victorious athlete and champion, Jesus Christ, after having run the race as it had never been run before, and reached the goal in the face of such

opposition and under the pressure of such a burden as man never before endured, had been called up by the Imperator to sit on his right hand, and to adjudge the prize in all races that should be thereafter run.

Because He sits high above the goal, because He is to judge the strife, and his hand is to confer the wreath of victory, we are to look unto Him as we run ; nay, as the Greek verb implies, *looking away from* all others, all else, we are to *look only to Him*. There is to be a deliberate and energetic concentration of our whole power and aspiration on Him. Even the cloud of witnesses is to be only a cloud, and nothing more. We may catch glimpses of them as we fly past ; their tones of encouragement and approval, their testimony to the might and victory of faith, may float down upon us through the air : but, precious as their sympathy and their testimony may be, we must not suffer them to divert our attention from Him. They are valuable and helpful to us in proportion as they bear witness to, as they fix our thoughts and affections on, Him from whom they drew their inspiration and strength. Nor are we to be for ever comparing ourselves with our rivals and companions, measuring ourselves against them, content if we do not fall behind them, judging of our success or failure by the position we occupy relatively to them. That is not how the runner who means to win carries himself. He fixes his eyes on, he bends all his energies toward, the goal, and the prize, and the Judge who awards the prize. There is much—so the Greek verb seems to imply—to solicit our attention, to divert our thoughts, in the

grandeur of the scene around us, in the bearing of the witnesses and of our rivals in the strife, in our own mental and emotional conditions, in the hopes and fears that arise within us ; but none of these must be allowed more than a passing thought ; we must arrest and fix our wandering gaze, fix it on the Judge. Looking away from all else, we are to look stedfastly on Jesus.

But why are we thus to concentrate our thoughts on Him ? Because He is "*the Author and Perfecter of faith*" —not only of *our* faith, as the English Version has it, but, as the Greek has it, of *faith*. In the previous Chapter, remember, the writer of this Epistle has been singing the praise and the triumphs of faith. And this is still his theme. But, both here and there, it is faith as a principle, not as a creed ; not as a system of co-ordinated beliefs, but as a condition and adventure of the soul, or as a life of which this condition is the animating and inspiring motive : in a word, the faith which makes men righteous. And when he speaks of Jesus as "*the Author and Perfecter*" of this faith, he means, I suppose, (1) that even the great cloud of witnesses, from the father of the faithful down to the last of his children who had "wrought righteousness," owed their faith to Jesus Christ, the everlasting Word, by whom all things were made and all men redeemed ; and (2) that in Jesus this divine principle of life first received its full incarnation, that in Him this ideal was first perfectly realized : and (3) that, if we are to live a life of faith, He must both originate this life in us and complete it. In Jesus faith, faith in God—faith *i.e.* in truth, in righteousness, in charity—is carried to a

pitch, a perfection, which we can find in no other son of God or son of man. None has ever so stripped Himself of self, so emptied and sacrificed Himself ; none has ever encountered and triumphed over an opposition so fierce, cruel, and sustained : none has shewn so complete and unwavering a confidence in the value of the struggle and of the prize. And hence, while we may learn much from the experience of others and draw no little encouragement from their sympathy and approval, we may learn all from Him to whom they all bear witness ; He alone can yield us a help answering to every need.

Looking away from all else, then, let us bend our eyes stedfastly on Him.

How confidently we may look to Him for all the grace and help we need, we learn from the next clause of the Verse : "*who, for the joy set before him, endured a cross, despising shame.*" For, as a Greek father (Theodoret) has well said, "The joy of the Saviour was the salvation of mankind,"—*our* salvation therefore, our salvation from sin into a righteousness, and into a triumph, like his own.

To secure this great end, this great joy, He *endured a cross* ; even this cruel and shameful burden could not abate his zeal, nor rob Him of the prize ; nor could the shame of it daunt his courage or turn Him from his aim. And what was his cross but the sense and burden of our sin ? What the shame which He despised but our shame in that, seeing the very ideal of Virtue and Righteousness, we did not recognize it, did not love and desire it, nay, hated it, and, so far as we could, banished it from the world ?

He who endured all this *for* us, and *from* us, can He withhold his sympathy and aid when, instead of opposing and rejecting Him, we set out on the very course He trod, press forward in it under manifold weaknesses and discouragements, looking stedfastly to Him for guidance, sympathy, and grace? Will He not rather stoop down to us from his high throne, and bend on us eyes so full of sympathy and love as that they shall shed new courage into our fainting hearts, new strength into our weary limbs? If our salvation is his joy, will He deny Himself the joy of saving us? If the reward and prize for which He strove was the salvation of the world, must not even the world be saved?

Consider Him, then, who endured such opposition at the hand of sinners who, in opposing Him, were opposing themselves, setting themselves against their own highest good. And if you have ceased to oppose Him, if you are looking to Him and longing for his salvation, be sure that his joy in saving you will be far greater than your joy in being saved. If *you* want to win, much more does *He* want, does He *mean*, you to win.

It would be easy to draw many lessons from this theme; but why should we do that when its true and main application is made for us in the Verses which follow the text? Right down to Verse 13 this image of the Race is maintained, although even in our Revised Version that fact is partly disguised from us. Suffer me, then, in conclusion, to complete my exposition of this passage, by briefly paraphrasing these



Verses so as to bring out the fact—you applying to yourselves, meanwhile, the exhortation which this Evangelist addressed to his old-time readers.

“*Ye have not yet resisted unto blood,*” like the martyrs who look down upon you from their heavenly seats, or like the Master and Judge who endured the cross—“*striving against sin*” (Ver. 4). Your race is partly a strife, as was that of Him who endured the opposition of sinners. And “sin” is your antagonist. You may have laid aside what weights, what habitual and popular sins, you could at the starting post; but you did not leave sin behind you when you set out. It is all about you like the atmosphere which surrounds you, like the wind against which the runner has to make his way. All through your course you will have to strive with it, and sometimes, if you are true to your aim, to strive unto blood. For you must regard as sin whatever would hold you back, or impede you in your course—even those natural inclinations and affections which, though innocent in themselves, become, if unduly indulged, as hindering weights or cling about you like a heavy encumbering robe. And, often, you are loath to part with them, to give up such an indulgence of them as would mar and impede your pursuit of truth and righteousness.

That is why the Lord never ceases to train you, why He rebukes and corrects you, why He even scourgeth every one of his children (Vers. 5, 6). “It is *for training*” that you are called to endure the loss of much which you love and to which you cling

(Ver. 7). And all such training seems for the present to be not joyous, but grievous; though afterwards it yields fruits of righteousness and peace to them that are *exercised*, to them that are *gymnasticized*, thereby (Ver. 11). Do not misunderstand the meaning and purpose of the Lord, then. The strokes, losses, afflictions which you often take as proofs that He has forgotten, or forgotten to be gracious to, you, are the most convincing proofs of his grace, proofs that He loves you and treats you as his children. They come to train you for the race and conflict which is the main duty and the chief joy of your life, to breathe and exercise you in the righteousness without which you can never enter into peace. They may, they must, grieve you for a time; but, for the joy set before you, can you not endure them? can you not even welcome them if you keep your eyes fixed on Him who endured so much more for you, and who was Himself made perfect by the things which He suffered?

They are his calls to you to arise and follow Him with a more complete devotion, in order that where He is there you may be also. They are his summons to you to strengthen your relaxed hands, to stiffen your trembling knees (Ver. 12), to press on your way with a more resolute heart. They bid you make straight, or even, paths, not *for*, but *with* your feet; to take a straight course toward the goal and prize, since to run in a crooked path, with its sudden twists and turns, or in a rough path, strewn with obstacles and thick with briars, may aggravate a lameness which would

otherwise be cured, and exhaust a strength which would otherwise be sufficient (Ver. 13). If the meaning of much of the discipline of life is to train you to a vigour which will enable you to meet and surmount the difficulties of the way, much of its discipline is also intended to prevent the weakness of your nature, your lameness, from passing into a dislocation or a strain (see Margin of Ver. 13 in Revised Version).

In fine, the whole discipline of the Christian life, in which you are apt to find a proof that you were never called to the service of God, or that you are not fit for it, is really a training, an invigorating or a curative process, by which He is preparing and enabling you to run the race set before you with patience and success, by which therefore He is making you meet to receive the prize. Take them, then, as from Him; take them as the tokens and proofs of his love: for they will be simply spurs in the sides of your intent when you know that they are meant, and are working, for your good; meant to transmute your faith into righteousness, and your righteousness into peace.

## XVI.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### I.—THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETS.

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance."—  
I TIMOTHY iv. 9.

WE are familiar with the fact that, under the Old Testament dispensation, there existed an order of men whom we call "the prophets;" and that these men were inspired of God. We admit, we believe, that the Divine Spirit by which they were "moved" enabled them both to grasp, and to apply to the moral conditions of the men of their own age, those eternal truths which underlie all the changes of time, and to foresee and foretell the forms which these truths would assume in the ages to come. To impress the divine law, "the statutes of life," on the hearts and consciences of men, to predict the happy consequences of obedience to that law and the terrible consequences of disobedience, this, as we all know, was the prophetic function and task. But we are not most of us equally familiar with the fact that, under the New Testament

dispensation as well as under the Old, in the Christian as well as in the Hebrew Church, there existed an order of prophets, holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost to quicken the sense of duty in the hearts of their fellows, and to foretell the things that were shortly to come to pass, *i.e.* to predict the inevitable results of obedience, and of disobedience, to the law of Christ.

When, for instance, we read that the Church, the household of faith, is "built on the foundation of the Apostles and *the prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone,"<sup>1</sup> we commonly assume that this foundation is composed of the twelve Apostles who walked with Christ, and of the Hebrew Prophets who declared the word of Jehovah before Christ came; we instinctively recall "the goodly fellowship" of which Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah were leading types, and that "glorious company" of which the leading types were Peter and Paul, James and John. Yet it is quite certain that it was not the Hebrew, but the Christian, prophets whom St. Paul had in his mind when he penned these words. In the very Epistle which contains them (comp. *Ephesians* ii. 20, with iv. 11) he writes: "Christ ascended up on high to give gifts to men; . . . and he gave some to be apostles, and some *prophets*, . . . *for the building up of the body of Christ.*" And, surely, no reflective reader can miss his meaning here. He speaks of gifts conferred by the *risen* Christ for the good of his Church, and among these gifts were *prophets* as well as apostles, evangelists, pastors,

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 20.

teachers. But how could the Hebrew prophets have been sent by Christ *after* his ascension into heaven? how could *they* have been charged with the building up of his Church? So again, in his Epistle to the Corinthians (i. xii. 28), St. Paul affirms: "God hath set some *in the church*, first apostles, secondly *prophets*, thirdly teachers;" and the Hebrew prophets were not colleagues and cotermporaries of the Christian apostles, nor were they "set" in the church of Christ.

Indeed the more carefully we collect and study the various passages of the New Testament in which the Christian order of prophets is alluded to or described, the more the wonder grows that we should have so generally overlooked their presence and activity in the primitive Church. We need but glance at a few passages in the New Testament to see how conspicuous they were, how large and important was the work they did.

While He still walked the earth, a Man with men, the Lord Jesus affirmed: "I will send them *prophets* and apostles, and some of them shall they slay and persecute;"<sup>1</sup> and, again: "Behold, I send unto you *prophets* and wise men and scribes, and some of them shall ye kill, and some of them shall ye scourge."<sup>2</sup> St. Peter marks the fulfilment of this promise on the day of Pentecost. What most impressed him in the prodigies of that great day was not the gift of tongues, with its thrilling notes and exstatic utterances, but that marvellous effusion of the Divine Spirit which moved

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiii. 34.

young men and old, moved even bond-men and bond-women, to prophesy in the name of Christ.<sup>1</sup> And from that day onward we find traces of this prophetic power in all the churches. Everywhere men "spake with tongues, and magnified God, and *prophesied*."<sup>2</sup> Among the most eminent of the Christian prophets were Barnabas, "the son of consolation;" Stephen, who "spake with the Holy Ghost and with power;" Agabus, who "signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine throughout all the world;"<sup>3</sup> Judas and Silas who, "being prophets, exhorted the" Christian "multitude" at Antioch "with many words and confirmed them;"<sup>4</sup> "Symeon who was also called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod:"<sup>5</sup> Timothy who, like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, was called the "man of God;" and, high above all this goodly fellowship in gifts and power, Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle of the Gentiles. No church seems to have been without them. In some churches, as in that of Corinth, they were so numerous, and so unrestrained in the exercise of their peculiar gift, that the Apostle had to remind them that "the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets," under their control, and enjoin them to "prophecy one by one," in a decent orderly way, "that all might learn, and all be comforted."<sup>6</sup>

So that, strange as it may seem to us, there were probably far more prophets actively at work in the first age of the Christian Church than in any age of the

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 17, 18.    <sup>2</sup> Ibid. x. 46; xix. 6.    <sup>3</sup> Ibid. xi. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. xv. 32.    <sup>5</sup> Ibid. xiii. 1.    <sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 31, 32.

Hebrew commonwealth ; there were scores and hundreds of men as truly inspired as Isaiah or Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Daniel, although few, if any, of their words have been recorded for our instruction.

There is, however, abundant proof that the gift and task of the Christian prophets closely resembled that of the Hebrew seers. The Christian, like the Hebrew, prophet foretold things to come. Agabus, for example, predicted the famine which fell on the Roman Empire in the days of Claudius Cæsar. The prophets of the Tyrian church warned St. Paul, "through the Spirit," not to go up to Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> "In every city"<sup>2</sup> there were those by whom "the Holy Ghost testified that bonds and afflictions awaited him : " Agabus, with a symbolism which must have recalled the old prophets to every Jewish mind, bound his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle, and said : "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."<sup>3</sup>

But though, beyond all doubt, the Christian prophets possessed and used this strange power of divination, it was not their main power, as it was not that of the Hebrew seers. The great gift of the prophet in every age is, that he sees eternal truths and facts more clearly and vividly than other men, and their bearing on the social and moral conditions of his own age, and of every age ; that, discerning what the will of the Lord is, he can speak it forth with a divine force and energy, so

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. xx. 22, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. xxi. 10-12.



speak it that it rouses the conscience and penetrates the heart. And what the Christian prophets valued most in their gift, what at least they were taught to value most, was this very power of so speaking the truth to a man that he could not shut out the light, but stood before it self-convicted, and self-condemned. When they prophesied in church, "and there came in an unbeliever, . . . the secrets of his heart were made manifest ; and falling down on his face, he worshipped God, declaring that God was in them of a truth."<sup>1</sup> Taught by Him before whose eyes all things are naked and open, they could read and interpret the mysteries of individual character—the hidden guilt, the secret penitence, the undeveloped or unrecognized faculty ; and hence they could say to one man, as to Ananias, "Why hast thou lied in thine heart ?" and to another, as to Lydia, "Thy sins are forgiven thee ;" and to a third, as to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist." Above all, they saw the "mysteries" which had been hidden from the beginning of the world, but were now revealed to faith, and by which the future of the world was to be shaped,—the mystery of that fatherly and redeeming Love which rose to its highest expression in the gift of Christ and the sacrifice of the Cross ; the mystery of the one body of Christ, in which there should be no place for national, social, or even sexual distinctions, no place for Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, but all should become one new manhood : the mystery of that final "glory" in which all the darknesses of time will

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

be swallowed up, and there shall be no more evil, no more pain.

*These* were the men who prophesied in every Church : and it was by their insight into the divine laws by which human life is controlled, by their power to "bid eternal truths be present facts," by their steadfast and ardent faith in a Father who loved all men, in a Son who came to take away the sin of the world, in a Spirit striving with all flesh, that they built up the Church of God. *These* were the men in whom "the spirit of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus ;" <sup>1</sup> *these* "the prophets who spake in the name of *the Lord*" (*i.e.* the Lord Jesus), and who have set us "an example of suffering affliction and of patience." <sup>2</sup>

But in the Church, as in the Temple, there were "prophets who prophesied falsely." "The mystery of iniquity" found a place and unfolded its powers side by side with "the mystery of godliness." He who had promised his disciples prophets who should speak in his name and minister life to their souls, also warned them that there would come prophets who should seek to betray and destroy them.<sup>3</sup>

"Many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many ;" <sup>4</sup> and, again : "Beware of false prophets, such

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xix. 10.

<sup>2</sup> James v. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Up to this point I am deeply indebted to Dean Plumptre's original and most valuable essay on "*The Prophets of the New Testament*" in 'Theology and Life,' an essay which, though it was published twenty years ago, has, for some inscrutable reason, failed to exert anything like its due influence on the New Testament exegesis and interpretation of our time.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxiv. 11.

as come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."<sup>1</sup> And the warning, like the promise, was amply verified. At Corinth the false prophets, rushing to the extreme of blasphemy, cried, "Jesus is Anathema!" Jesus is accursed!<sup>2</sup> At Colosse, vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind, they attempted to substitute subtle speculations on ineffable mysteries for simple faith in Christ, an ascetic denial of sensual lusts, or a licentious indulgence of those lusts, for the service of charity, and thus to detach men from their true Head and Lord.<sup>3</sup> In Ephesus they denied that Jesus had come in the flesh, affirmed that since He had not come in the flesh, the flesh with its lusts was beyond his jurisdiction, and concluded that an unclean life was no violation of his law, no barrier to his salvation.

It was to guard the Churches against the wiles and lures of these false prophets that St. Paul affirmed, that no prophecy was of God which was not "according to the proportion," or analogy, "of the faith," which did not harmonize with the great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh." It was with these men, with their blasphemies and immoralities, in his mind, that St. John warned his "little children" to "try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world," and to be sure that the spirit of no prophet was of God if it denied that "Jesus Christ had come in the flesh."<sup>4</sup>

In the primitive Church, then, there was a stirring and

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Col. ii. 18-23.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John iv. 1-4.

widely-diffused prophetic activity. The old prophetic power, so long silent, uttered itself through many voices, voices which pierced men to the very heart, and compelled them to confess and adore the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And it may be that the marvellous spread of the Gospel in that age, which has ever been a mystery even to the Church itself, was in large measure due to the power with which the Christian prophets bore witness to Him by whose Spirit they were inspired. That their light should cast dark shadows, that the steps of the true prophets should be dogged, and their work burlesqued, by false prophets, accords with all we know of the religious history of the race. Whenever the kingdom of light has shone with unwonted force, the kingdom of darkness has been roused to an energy beyond its wont. And, therefore, the presence of false prophets in the primitive Church is only an added testimony to the reality and the greatness of the work achieved by the prophets in whom the very Spirit of Christ abode, and through whom He spoke to men.

But what has all this, however interesting and instructive in itself, to do with "the faithful sayings" on the study of which we enter to-day? It has much to do with them, so much that we cannot apprehend their force and value apart from it. For these faithful sayings are, in all probability, *prophetic* sayings, sayings first uttered by the prophets of the Church; while, possibly, they are the only specimens of their work now left us, though I should not be surprised were the critics some

day to discover that we are also indebted to them for many of the hymns of praise imbedded in the Apocalypse. Obviously St. Paul quotes them from some other lips than his own, adducing them in proof or confirmation of his own words. Obviously, too, from the very tone in which he cites them, they were well known and widely approved, sayings which carried authority in many, or even in all, the churches of the time. And for these and other reasons, several of our ablest critics and commentators maintain that, in these faithful sayings, we have words uttered by the Christian prophets, words which, when tested by those who were bound to "try the spirits," were accepted and approved; words which were found to be so apt and simple and terse that they spread from church to church, and were tossed from lip to lip, as proverbs are at this day, until they became "household words" at least in "the household of faith:" words which even an inspired Apostle could quote as of a high and acknowledged authority, as even more likely than his own words to command an universal assent. And if we remember that these sayings are found only in the Pastoral Epistles, and that these Epistles were not written till more than thirty years after the Day of Pentecost, more than thirty years, *i.e.* after the Christian prophets had commenced their work, we shall at least admit that there had been ample time for some of their sayings to have crept into common use, to have won general acceptance as true, trustworthy, and most happy expressions of the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

Your great difficulty, perhaps, in at once receiving these faithful sayings as prophetic utterances will be, that they do not seem to require so strange an origin ; that they do not rise so high above the level of the writings in which they are found as to stand out and challenge an inspiration higher than that of the verses immediately around them. And that, I think, is quite true, though some of these sayings are of a remarkable and exquisite beauty, and set themselves to a most musical rhythm as we recite them. Whether for greatness of thought or beauty of style it would be easy to match such sayings as these out of St. Paul's own writings: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"<sup>1</sup> or, again, "Faithful is the saying, If a man seek the pastoral office, he desireth a good work ;"<sup>2</sup> or, again: "Faithful is the saying, that those who believe in God should follow honest occupations."<sup>3</sup> But such as *these* sound a far higher note: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation ; For to this end we both labour and strive, because we have set our hope on God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe :"<sup>4</sup> or, again, "Faithful is the saying, For if we died with Him, we shall also live with him ; if we endure, we shall also reign with him ; if we shall deny him, he also will deny us : if we are faithless, he abideth faithful ; for he cannot deny himself : "<sup>5</sup> or, to crown all, take this: "But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Titus iii. 8.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 9, 10.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 11-13.

love toward man, appeared, not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour ; that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life, according to hope." <sup>1</sup> Yet, noble as these latter sayings are, and though the last I quoted requires to be sung rather than said, St. Paul often touches as high a mark and sings in a strain as noble, even in these Pastoral Epistles. What, for example, can be finer than the verses in which, after bidding us pray "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," he adds : "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth : For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time ?" <sup>2</sup> What can be finer, unless it be the well-known passage in 1 Timothy iii. 16, which, in the Greek, bears all the marks of a citation from an inspired ode or hymn ?—"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,

God was manifest in the flesh,  
Justified in the spirit,  
Seen of angels ;  
Preached unto the Gentiles,  
Believed on in the world,  
Taken up into glory."

<sup>1</sup> Titus iii. 4-8.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 3-6.

But if, because we find as noble words set to as perfect music in the writings of St. Paul as in any of the faithful sayings which he quotes, we are tempted to doubt whether these sayings fell from the lips of inspired prophets, we must remember that St. Paul himself was a prophet, as well as an Apostle, and the greatest prophet of the primitive Church. Hence his words are likely to be fully on a level with those of the other prophets, likely even to soar to a higher level at times. We must remember that the sayings which the Church most loved, which would carry most weight with them because they were most familiar to them, would be precisely those which conveyed the very essence of the Gospel in simple yet noble forms, in forms which every man could carry about with him, and cite as conclusive in any exhortation he gave or any argument in which he engaged; precisely such sayings, *i.e.* as we have now heard St. Paul quote, and which are familiar to us as "the faithful sayings" of the primitive Church. And we must remember how strange and wonderful such sayings would be to men who had just broken from the hard and narrow observances of Judaism or the foul darkness of heathenism, how much more strange and wonderful, how much more full of meaning and beauty, than they can possibly be to us who have long had the light, even if we have not walked in it.

However simple, or however noble or poetic, the form of these sayings, their distinctive characteristic is that they are brief and portable summaries of those truths which were most surely believed in the Apostolic Church.



Once uttered in the Christian assemblies, they were found to be full of truth and grace. Those who first heard them felt that the precious truths enshrined in them had never been so happily expressed—for, remember, the New Testament was not yet in common use; nay, they felt them to be so happily expressed that it was impossible to improve upon them. They treasured them in their memories and hearts, cited them in their worship, in their intercourse with each other, and with neighbouring churches. These neighbouring churches also acknowledged their charm, adopted them and made them their own; until at last, after twenty or thirty years' use, they became the common property of the whole Church, and received the stamp of universal approval. The Church pronounced them "*faithful*," i.e. perfectly reliable, sayings, entitled to implicit credence; and "*worthy of all acceptance*," i.e. either deserving to be accepted by all men everywhere, or deserving of every kind of acceptance which men could accord to them, since there was food in them for brain and heart, for imagination, and faith, and devotion.

Not improbably, as a shrewd and learned critic suggests,<sup>1</sup> the children and converts of the early Church committed them to memory, and were catechised on them in the public assemblies for worship, since the catechetical was one of the earliest forms of instruction in the Church: so that, by the time St. Paul quoted them, they would be as familiar and authoritative to

<sup>1</sup> See the comment on 1 Timothy i. 15, in *A Popular Commentary on the New Testament*.

Timothy and Titus, and indeed to all the younger members of the Christian Church, as the questions and answers of the Assembly's Catechism are to some of us, or the creeds of the Prayer-book to many of our neighbours. If our youth was nourished on such phrases as "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever," or, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," they never wholly lose their sacred charm for us, whatever havoc doubt or worldliness may have wrought on our cradle-faith ; while, if we still hold that faith fast, they grow in charm and significance the longer we use them. And we may well believe that the "faithful sayings" quoted by St. Paul would continue to exert a similar charm and power on the children who had first heard them from parental lips, or on the converts who had been catechized in them when, and long after, they turned to Christ.

Whether, by a faithful study of these faithful sayings we shall ever be able to recover the Catechism of the primitive Church, I do not know ; but of this we may be very sure ; that we cannot study these Sayings intelligently without recovering, if not the whole creed, at least the fundamental truths of the creed, held by the Church of the Apostles ; and that we cannot study them in an earnest and devout spirit without swelling the volume and the ardour of our faith in the truth as it is in Jesus.

## XVII.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### II.—THE PURPOSE OF THE ADVENT.

“Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”—I TIMOTHY i. 15.

THE Scriptures of the New Testament yield, as I shewed you last Sunday, many infallible proofs that, in the Apostolic Church, there was a marvellous outbreak of the prophetic activity which had seemed to come to an end with Malachi. In every congregation there were “holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost;” men in whom the spirit of prophecy bore testimony to Jesus as the Christ; men endowed with so rare a power of reading the heart in the face, and of seeing “the future in the instant,” as to be able to “discern spirits,” foretell the things which must shortly come to pass, and so powerfully apply the truth as it is in Jesus to the various characters and wants of men that even the unbelievers who came into the Christian assemblies, “finding the secrets of their hearts made manifest,

fell down on their faces and worshipped God, declaring that God was in them of a truth."

Side by side with these prophets who spake in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the inspiration of his Spirit, there stood false prophets who were moved by seducing spirits, and deceived many. Vain and unruly talkers, puffed up in their fleshly minds, much occupied with genealogies and strifes, with foolish questions and old wives' fables, they taught things which they should not for the sake of base gain, denying that Christ had come in the flesh, saying that there was no resurrection or that it was already past, imposing unprofitable ordinances with their "Handle not, taste not, touch not" which, though they had a show of severity to the body, had no real force against its passions and lusts.

Hence it became necessary, as both St. Paul and St. John discovered, that the spirits of the prophets should be tried, and the words which they professed to speak in the name of the Lord. If any spirit denied that Christ had come in the flesh, that spirit was not of God. If any word "gendered contentions" or made light of "good works," if any word were not profitable for instruction or reproof, for correction or discipline, in righteousness, that word was not of God, even though it fell from a prophet's or an angel's lips. The Church was "to judge" the prophetic utterances, and to receive only those which were faithful and true. Even the sayings accepted by one church were not necessarily approved by other churches; these, too, would test them in their turn: and only as they received the general sanction could they pass into

general use. Only when they had received the imprimatur of the whole Church were they held to be not only "faithful," *i.e.* perfectly reliable, "sayings," but sayings so true in substance and so happy in form as to be "worthy of all acceptance." But when once they *had* passed through this ordeal, and won this wide, if not universal, approval, they were deemed to be so valuable, and of such sovereign authority, that in all probability the children, and the converts, of the Church were taught to commit them to memory, and were publicly catechized on them, so that they became household words in the household of faith—the axioms and proverbs of the Church, which, if they could be cited on this side of an argument or on that, put an end to all controversy.

When St. Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles more than thirty years had elapsed since the day of Pentecost, since the Holy Spirit had been poured out abundantly on the followers of Christ, since, in short, the Christian prophets had commenced their work. Hence there had been plenty of time before St. Paul wrote his letters to Timothy and Titus for many of these prophetic sayings to come into general vogue in the Church, and to gather an authority which no disciple of Christ would for a moment dispute. In these Epistles we find him quoting at least five, and possibly more than five, sayings which bear all the marks of having passed through the process I have just described, and of having acquired an authority to which the whole company of the faithful would defer. For they were *faithful* sayings; they had won an

universal acceptance, an unchallenged authority, simply because they expressed the essential truths of the Gospel in concise, memorable, and sometimes in beautiful and poetic, forms. What more reasonable, then, than that, with many of our most learned and able commentators, we should assume these faithful sayings to have been *prophetic* sayings, sayings from which we may infer what the teaching of the Christian prophets was like, and why the Church treasured their words in her memory and heart?

This, at all events, as I forewarned you in my last Discourse, is the point of view from which we are about to regard them. And if the first of these sayings, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," sounds more like a proverb to you, or even a New Testament commonplace, than an inspiration or a poem, I must beg you to remember, first, that even proverbs were held to be a very choice form of poetry by the ancients—as well they might be when even that great poem *Job* is written in the gnomic style: and I must also ask you to remember that sentences which the use of centuries has rendered smooth and familiar to our ears, so that they no longer release any deep emotion within us, may have possessed a very rare and marvellous value when they were first written, when the image and superscription of the Great King was sharp and clear upon them, and when the facts and truths they represented were even more rare and wonderful than the admirable forms in which they were enshrined.

Do not misconceive me, however. I am not apologizing

for this faithful saying, this prophetic saying, or even for any poverty or imperfection in its form. It needs, it admits, of no apology. That "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is still one of the grandest sayings in the world, for all so simple as it sounds ; and there must in very deed have been a divine grace and inspiration on the lips to which we owe it. It is only by a sustained effort of imagination that we can in any measure conceive what it was to those on whose waiting and prepared ears it originally fell. But even to us, whose ears are dulled by long use, the words grow mysterious and impressive as we ponder on them. Is there nothing strange, nothing mystic, in the phrase, "Christ Jesus *came*—Christ Jesus *advented*—into the world" ? That could be said of none but Him. For it implies that his coming, his advent, was a conscious and voluntary act, a self-determining effort of his will. It implies his pre-existence in some other world ; it implies that He did not begin to be when He came into this world ; nor come into it, as we come, apart from his own knowledge and choice. Nothing less than the great mystery of godliness is in these words or in the New Testament use of them ;—the eternal being and the incarnation of the Divine Word and Son, God manifest in the flesh. For who is this that comes into the world not by the decree of a Will higher than his own, but by his own act and deed ? who is this if not God Himself ?

No doubt this saying won universal acceptance in the Church, and was commended as a faithful saying by St. Paul, in part because it contained the confession that

God was in Christ Jesus, and that Christ had come in the flesh ; for thus it met and satisfied the test by which the Apostles had demanded that all "spirits," and all spiritual utterances, should be tried. Yet surely it was not this alone, nor this mainly, which commended it to the general heart. Even *we* value the dogma of "the proper deity of Christ" mainly because, holding that truth, we can see and believe that He is our Saviour indeed ; mainly because, since *God* was in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto Himself, we are sure that the world was in very deed reconciled unto God. And, therefore, we may well believe that the Apostolic Church loved and adopted this prophetic saying, not so much for its opening as for its closing words. That "Christ Jesus *came into the world*" was much ; but that He "*came into the world to save sinners*"—*this* was the pathetic surprise, *this* the mystery of grace, which broke men down into tears of penitence and love and rapture, before which Jew and Gentile fell on their faces and worshipped Him.

That God should come into the world to bless, to reward, his loyal and obedient servants was no more than any Jew would have expected of Him ; for had He not shewn Himself to Abraham and Moses and Elijah, and talked with them face to face, as a man talketh with his friends ? That a God should come into the world to aid and protect those who were specially devoted to his service, or even to gratify his own lust and caprice, was what any Greek would be prepared to expect : for had not his ears buzzed with such fables ever since he had



seen the stately forms of his divinities towering, in their white marble loveliness, above the altars in street and temple, or listened to the wandering rhapsodists reciting the Homeric strains? But that God, in Christ, should come down into the world, not to indulge his preferences and lusts, not to aid and protect his devotees, not even to succour and reward the righteous men who walked in all his ordinances and commandments blameless, but *to save sinners*, to bless his enemies, to redeem those whom the pious Jew denounced as "this people that is accursed," and the cultivated Greek scorned as "the foolish and wretched herd, debarred from wisdom,"—O, this was a marvel beyond all marvels: it was a truth, if indeed it could be true, to break and win all hearts, and to revolutionize the whole structure of human life and thought!

In the primitive Church, too, not many wise, not many "righteous," were called. It was the foolish and the wicked, the peasant and the slave, sinners of the Jews and sinners of the Gentiles, to whom, for the most part, the gospel was preached, or preached with vital and saving effect. And what a Gospel it must have been to *them*, shut out as they had been from all self-respect and hope, held incapable of wisdom or of goodness, banned and scorned from the cradle to the grave? what a Gospel to learn that the very Son of God had pitied *them* whom no man pitied, loved *them* whom all men hated or despised; that He had emptied Himself of his glory and come down into their low and sorrowful conditions, not to judge and condemn them, but to save

them from their sins, infirmities, sorrows, to give them wisdom, to make them righteous, and to restore them to self-respect, to kindle in their hearts the cleansing and illuminating fires of an immortal hope? In a Church composed of men who had been lost but were found, who had been dead in trespasses and sins, but were now alive unto righteousness, and who felt that they owed this wondrous change and transformation, this new eternal life, to Christ alone, is it any marvel that the saying, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,*" was held to be a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance; a saying more precious than all the sentences of the wise or all the ethical maxims of the good; a saying which set itself to the music of the joy it inspired, and deserved to be had in everlasting remembrance?

Nay, though it be so simple and familiar, is it not most precious even to us, full of a divine consolation, an unfailing spring of hope? Which of us has not sinned, try ourselves by what standard we will? Which of us, despite our penitence and faith, does not at this moment sorrowfully confess that he is still a sinner, most unworthy of the mercy of God, unworthy even to lift up his eyes to the pure heaven in which He dwells? If any man think himself a saint, what need we any other proof that he is the most hopeless of sinners? If any man think himself a saint, let him listen to one whom even he will confess to have a better claim to that title than himself. Even in St. Paul's writings there is no more humbling and pathetic stroke than the words he ap-

pende to this "faithful saying." Although for more than twenty years he had endured the loss of all things for Christ's sake ; although he had been, and knew that he had been, more abundant both in labour and in suffering than any other of the Apostles, he cannot say, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," without adding, "Of whom I am chief!" nay, without going on to explain that he, the chief of all sinners, has obtained mercy, not for his own sake, not simply that *he* might be recovered to life and hope, but also that in him, as the first and greatest of transgressors, "Christ Jesus might shew forth the whole of his long-suffering, as a pattern for those who should afterward believe on him unto life eternal!" And if such an one as Paul the aged—the apostle, the prisoner, the martyr—held himself to be the chief sinner of the race, saved only that none, however guilty, might ever despair, which of us must not account himself more sinful than he, and less worthy of eternal life ?

When we sin, or when we grow deeply conscious of our manifold and deep offences against the Divine law, our first, our most constant, thought is that God is estranged from us, and hostile to us. We fear Him whom we ought to love and trust ; we account ourselves beyond the reach of hope. Many of us, I fear, know little of that inward, cleaving, and profound sense of sin, that poignant and abiding compunction, which shook the very soul of the aged Apostle, and constrained him to wonder that God should have had mercy on one so steeped in guilt. Do *you* know it, my brethren ? Do

you know what it is to have the sins of past years defile before you in sad procession, to have the vaults of memory give up their dead, to tread again and again the same dreary round of miserable and self-accusing thoughts, to hate and loathe yourselves for the transgressions by which you wronged your souls in the times of your ignorance or in the hot hours of youth, sins of which you thought little then, but which now shew large and black in the light of the Divine Purity? Do you know what it is to have the conviction burned into your very heart that God has forgotten to be gracious, that his mercy is clean gone for ever, that He will be favourable no more? If you do, if you have at all entered into this profound experience of Psalmists and Apostles, no words were ever so musical, so impressive, so welcome, to you as the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners.*" For if He came to save sinners, He came to save *you* from your sins. And if He came into the world for the express purpose of saving you, and such as you, must not his purpose be fulfilled? It is He against whom you have sinned. *Cannot* He forgive you, then? And if He *came* to forgive you, *will* He not forgive?

What proof *can* move and convince penitent but still-doubting hearts that fear to trust his grace if not this—that, for no other end than your forgiveness and salvation, He who made you laid aside his glory, took your nature and your infirmities, suffered with you and for you, and has gone up on high to prepare a place for you, in order that where He is there you may be also?

Are there any here who cannot accept this saying, and give their contrite and troubled hearts the rest of faith? True, you are sinners : but Christ came to save sinners. You may be great sinners : but Christ came into the world to take away the sin of the world, to take away *all* sin and all uncleanness. And cannot He, the General Saviour of Mankind, take away the sins of a single heart, however many or heinous they may be? I indeed am no prophet, but in the name of all the prophets, and of Him who inspired them all, I venture to assure you that, if you are really sorry for your sins, and honestly want to be quit of them, you *are* quit of them, through the grace of Christ Jesus who came into the world to save sinners, even the chief and the worst : you are quit of them now, at this very moment ; for your sorrow for sin and your craving for salvation from it are infallible proofs that his Spirit is even now already at work upon your hearts, that his salvation is beginning to take effect upon you. For there is no man so vile that he need have any fear, any doubt, of his redemption from all evil, his redemption into all righteousness, so long as the prophetic voice rings through the Church of God, and proclaims the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," He becoming sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

## XVIII.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### III.—THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

"Faithful is the saying : For if we died with him, we shall also live with him ; if we endure, we shall also reign with him : if we should deny him, he also will deny us ; if we are faithless, he abideth faithful, for he cannot deny himself."—2 TIMOTHY ii. 11-13.

ONE of the household words of the Christian brotherhood, a word uttered by an inspired prophet, and both cited and approved by an inspired Apostle, has already engaged our attention. As we studied it together, I tried to shew you that the faithful saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," simple and familiar as it sounds to us, must have come with rare freshness and power to those who first believed unto eternal life ; and that, since it implies both the divinity and the incarnation of the Word and Son of God, and reveals the very end and essence of his redeeming work, it is still worthy of all acceptance.

1. And, now, another of these household words of the

Church lies before us, another saying as truly inspired as the psalms of David or the odes of Isaiah. In its very form, indeed, it bears some resemblance to the ancient Hebrew poems, and thus presents these "faithful sayings" in a new aspect to our minds. As many of them as extend beyond a single brief sentence have a certain poetic character and rhythm. Scholars have no difficulty in arranging the original words of my text so as to frame a tiny Greek poem which meets and satisfies the rules of Greek art. And this rhythmical flow of the words has, of course, attracted much attention, and led the critics to spin many an hypothesis. The most generally accepted theory at present is that these Sayings were so beloved in the primitive Church, and were held to be such choice and precious expressions of religious thought and emotion, that they were sung in public worship as hymns of praise to Christ. I do not wonder that this suggestion has found much favour, though it can only apply to some of these Sayings, not all. Even in our English Version the Saying now before us has a certain distinction, a certain selectness of diction and stateliness of movement, such as we look for in a poem, and which render it easy to throw it into measured lines :—

If we died with Him, we shall also live with Him ;  
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him ;  
If we should deny Him, He also will deny us ;  
If we are faithless, He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

And this poetic tone is even more apparent in another

of these remarkable Sayings (Titus iii. 4-8), the balanced and musical cadences of which I will ask you to mark as I recite it:—

But when the kindness of God our Saviour,  
And his love toward man, appeared ;  
Not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done,  
But according to his mercy, He saved us,  
By the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost,  
Which He poured out on us abundantly,  
Through Jesus Christ our Saviour ;  
That, being justified by his grace,  
We should be made heirs of eternal life,  
According to hope.

To a trained and susceptible ear, the elaborate structure of this fine sentence, the long suspense of thought, the distinction of its style, the stateliness of its movement, would probably suggest that, in the Original, it was a poem, or part of a poem ; and that even the translation retained some traces of its original beauty.

But if these faithful sayings, or some of them, are poetic in form, does it inevitably follow that they were hymns, or verses from the hymns, of the primitive Church ? I think not. The Bible itself suggests a more probable explanation. *All* prophecy rises, or tends to rise, into song. At the outset the prophet may speak plain prose, though his very prose is apt to take a noble and elevated tone ; but in the full rush and swing of his inspiration he breaks into singing as naturally as a bird. Take any one of the Hebrew prophets, and you find him a poet, "one who sings" as well as "one who sees." However low the ground from which he starts, as the



inspiration grows upon him he rises into the heaven of song, and showers down on us notes so piercing and so sweet that even our dull hearts are raised toward the heaven from which he sings. Hence we need no theory of Church hymns to account for the poetic form of the Sayings we owe to the Christian prophets: for how could they be prophets without being poets also? without passing at times into those elevated and balanced utterances in which all intense and passionate emotion expresses itself? Their rhythmical and stately cadences are only another point of resemblance between the words of the Christian and the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and indicate that both were inspired by one and the selfsame Spirit.

2. But now let us turn to the special Saying before us. It has one beauty, one excellence of construction, which our Authorized Version makes no attempt to retain; which our Revised Version does indeed suggest though only to a scholarly and attentive reader; and on which, since no Version can fully convey it, I must expend a few words, that you may recognize it, and see how much it contributes to the significance of the passage.

Look, then, at the first three clauses of our Saying. The first verb in each of these clauses is in a different tense both in the Original, and in our new version of the Original Text. The first clause runs: "If we *died* with him, we shall also live with him," where the verb "died" is in the past tense. But the Greek has several past tenses, and, among them, one (the *aorist*) which

always points to a single definite action in the past,—not to a general course of conduct which may have spread over months and years, but to a particular act done at a fixed moment, done once for all. So that from the very construction of the clause we learn that, when St. Paul speaks of our having “died” with Christ, he refers not to some continuous and undefined process of inward experience, but to a single and definite act, on a certain fixed occasion, in which once for all this death was accomplished. What one act could that be? Elsewhere (*e.g.* Romans vi. 3–11) he affirms that when we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death; that, in the act of baptism, we both died with Him, and pledged ourselves to that daily death unto evil which is the condition of all true life. And as this is a standing and constant thought with the Apostle, we conclude that here also he refers to our baptism as the moment, the act, in which we died, with Christ, to the flesh and to the lusts thereof, that we might live with Him, live in the spirit, live unto God.

The second clause runs: “If we *endure*, we shall also reign with him;” and the verb for “endure” is in the present tense, to denote, I suppose, that endurance for Christ’s sake is, not a single past act, but a state from which we are never exempt on earth; that it is a task to which we are called night and day so long as we live. You will need to observe, too, that the word St. Paul selects here does not mean simply a meek and patient resignation to unavoidable sufferings, but a brave and gay endurance, a soldier-like fortitude and courage, a

joyful constancy which takes pleasure and pride in bearing the ills, losses, sorrows involved in a loyal love to Christ, which, for his sake, glories in tribulation also.

The third clause runs: "If we *should deny* him, he also will deny us:" and the verb for "deny," is not in the past like the first, nor in the present like the second, but in the future tense. Now in the selection of this tense we have one of those subtle indications of the delicate and generous consideration for others of which we find so many in the writings of the Apostle, one of those strokes of a native and inborn courtesy which compel us to exclaim, "What a gentleman the man was!"<sup>1</sup> He will only conceive of our denying Christ as an improbable contingency, a bare possibility in some distant and dubious future. He has no doubts, or expresses none, that we really died to sin when, in our baptism, we put on Christ. He takes it for granted that, in the present, we are gaily enduring whatever hardships and sacrifices may flow from an unwavering loyalty to Christ. But if he must conceive the possibility of our denying Christ, he will only conceive of it as a remote contingency, a doubtful peradventure, a thing which has not happened yet and is by no means likely to happen; "if we *should* deny Christ, he also will deny us."

So that the literal meaning of our Saying, as quoted

<sup>1</sup> I assume that St. Paul is responsible for the tenses, that he adapted his quotation to his use, just as we often slightly vary any verse from the poets we cite, in order to make it fit the context. The original Saying may very probably have used the present tense throughout.

and modified by St. Paul, may be paraphrased thus : " If we died, *as no doubt we did die*, to sin with Christ when we publickly avowed ourselves to be his disciples, we shall share his immortal, his eternal, life. If we are bravely enduring the losses, troubles, labours, persecutions, which a faithful adherence to Christian principles involves, *as no doubt we are*, we shall not only live with Christ, but reign with Him in glory everlasting. If, unhappily, in any moment of grave temptation, we should so far forget ourselves as to deny Christ, *which is possible though wellnigh incredible*, then He must deny us ; for if we are faithless, He is faithful ; He cannot deny Himself, and He Himself has warned us that, if we are ashamed of Him before men, He will be ashamed of us when He shall come in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels. The Faithful One cannot love and bless the unfaithful."

3. And now, that this Faithful Saying may grow still clearer to you and more full of meaning, mark for a moment how it fits into St. Paul's general course of thought. He had exhorted Timothy (Ver. 3) to share his labour and affliction in the Gospel. He enforces his exhortation with three illustrations. The soldier, that he may please his captain, does not entangle himself with the common affairs, occupations, businesses of life (Ver. 4) ; *i.e.* the Christian, that he may please Christ, *dies*, with Christ, to the world. An athlete in the games is not crowned unless he strive according to rule (Ver. 5) : and the *Christian* rule is that we are to die with Christ to all evil, to endure hardships for his sake, and never

to be so unfaithful as to deny Him. The labouring husbandman ought to be the first to partake of the fruit of his toils (Ver. 6): if Timothy prove himself a diligent husbandman in the field of Christian service, he shall have his fruit, for he shall live and reign with Christ. Paul is content to labour and endure; *he* glories in his afflictions and bonds for the Gospel's sake; for the word of God is not bound because he is bound, but his very chain makes converts (Vers. 9, 10). And, therefore, he is content to endure all things, that the elect may obtain salvation and eternal glory. Let Timothy be of the same mind; let him urge his flock to be of the same mind, putting them in remembrance that to die with Christ, and to endure for Christ, is the one profitable course for Christian men.

You see: the husbandman, the athlete, the soldier, Timothy, Paul himself, all help to illustrate this faithful saying, and to prove it worthy of all acceptation.

4. So far, however, we have had to deal mainly with the form of this fine Saying, with the delicacies and beauties of its structure, and the light which these throw on its meaning. If, at last, we turn to its vital substance, two questions at once suggest themselves. (1) What was there in this Saying which made it so precious, so highly prized in the primitive Church? And (2) What is there in it which should make it equally valuable to us?

The answer to the first of these questions is simple and direct, and really answers the second also. We may be very sure that to men, like the early disciples,

just redeemed from ignorance, superstition, and vice, those sayings would be most precious which expressed the substance of the gospel in terse, winning, and memorable forms. And in this Saying there is not a single clause which does not embody some of the most essential and august facts and truths of the Christian Faith. Take it clause by clause once more, and ask yourselves what it would suggest to Jews and Gentiles who, within a few years, had been redeemed and reconciled to God.

*"If we died with him, we shall also live with him."* What would that suggest? It could not fail to recall that "death of the Cross" in which they saw a sacrifice that took away the sin of the world ; by which, as they held, all men had been reconciled to God and to each other ; so that now there was hope for every man, however vile, and all walls of partition had been broken down, all the various classes and races of men, who had been hateful and hating each other, were made one in Him in whom there was no room for Jew or Greek, bond or free, rich or poor ; in whom the sinner was assured that God had loved him from before the foundation of the world, and the slave was enfranchised into a happy liberty. *We* have talked so long, so technically or so perfunctorily, of the death of Christ, we have so sickened ourselves with discussing theories of the Atonement, that we forget how large, impressive, and wonderful a fact the death of the Cross must have been to men who might any day be hung on a cross like that of Christ, simply because they believed on his

Name. To their simple but living faith, the dying of the Lord Jesus was the great wonder of all time, the pivot on which the destinies of the universe turned, the source and centre of a sacred and redeeming influence which should yet create a new heaven and a new earth. The tragic catastrophe of the world's story, it was also the prologue to a sacred age of peace and goodwill, the initial moment of which was at the very door; an age in which God would make his tabernacle with men and wipe away all tears from their faces. Eye itself could not see, nor heart of man conceive, nor hope grasp, the glories about to be revealed. And all these glories had been won for men by that divine death, the very thought of which might well move them to a passion of sorrow and love and devotion.

And while recalling the great event of time, the words "We *died* with him" would also recall the most sacred and momentous act of their lives. Baptism was far more to them than it is, or can be, to us. To them it was putting on Christ in the face of a hostile world; it was avowing a faith for which they had to risk the loss of all things, even of life itself. So solemn, so sacred was this act in their thoughts, so completely did it identify them with Christ, that in the earliest ages of the Church there grew up the superstitious conviction that the baptized could not sin, or that their every sin was "a sin unto death." For them, to sin after they had become one with Christ, was as though they had made Him to sin—a mortal and unpardonable offence.

And hence many of them deferred baptism till death was close at hand lest, by a single transgression, they should forfeit eternal life. In the time of the Apostles this fear-breeding conviction may not have grown to the proportions it afterward assumed ; but no such tenet would have been possible in the second age of the Church if, in the first age, baptism had not been regarded as a decisive and solemn act in which men really renounced the world and became partakers both in the death and in the life of Christ. They must have gone to it with a fervour of devotion, an awe of spirit, a sense that they were affronting some desperate risk, a passionate supplication for strength and grace, such as I suppose a devout Scotch Highlander may still know when at last he is induced to approach the table of the Lord. The baptismal vow must have carried in it a force capable of changing and raising the whole current of their lives ; and any words which recalled to them both the death of the Cross and the vow of their Baptism might well touch the deepest chords of emotion within them, and be deemed worthy of all acceptance.

*"If we endure, we shall also reign with him."* This clause, again, suggests a precisely similar strain of thought. How could they be exhorted to "endure" with Christ, and not recall the grace and patience with which, through a life short in years indeed, but in sorrows above all measure long, He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself ; how could they think of their own constancy under temptation and



affliction and not remember how *his* righteous soul was vexed from day to day, not only by the lawless deeds of the wicked, but by the dulness, defection, treachery of his friends? The words could hardly fail to call up in their memories all that was most heroic, and yet most tender and pathetic, in the life of the Man of Sorrows, who, though He had all power in heaven and on earth, cheerfully endured all the wrongs and miseries of time.

*Were* they to endure with Him, and like Him? Were they, as the faithful saying implied, to endure loss and pain and wrong with a constant and courageous gaiety of spirit, because they endured them for his sake? Think how their hearts must have trembled at times. Any one of their assemblies might be broken up by the legionaries, or the mob. At any moment, an envious rival, a morose servant, a delator who lived by his base trade, might denounce them to the Roman magistrates. They might have to suffer stripes, imprisonment, bonds. They might be called to fight with gladiators or wild beasts in the arena; or to see wife, sister, child, torn or trampled to death on its sands. Was it in them to meet all this, or even the lingering agonies of the Cross, with a constant soul, to triumph over it, to rejoice in it? O marvellous power of faith and love! it *was* in them. In this very age they crowded in such numbers to the Roman tribunals to avow themselves followers of the crucified Nazarene; not waiting to be betrayed or denounced, they courted death so gaily, that the judges had to stay their hands for very weariness, and the

bishops of the Church had to rebuke their eagerness for martyrdom, and to remind them that Christ was to be served in life as well as by death. To live and reign with Christ, to follow Him to the heaven into which He had gone up, was so present and so great a reward, that they were content to endure unto the uttermost with Him.

And yet there must have been some among them whose nerves were weak, whose faith was not a steadfast flame. There must have been some—we know there were a few even in the Apostolic age—who could not leave wife or husband, parents and children, goods, and home, and life, for Christ's sake and the gospel's; whose faces blanched, whose heart fainted, before the agonies of the arena, or the shame of the cross. With trembling hand and averted eyes they threw a few grains of incense on the altar of the reigning Cæsar, and thus renounced Christ and his salvation. And, hence, to the members of the primitive Church the words: "*If we should deny him, he also will deny us: if we are faithless, he abideth faithful, for he cannot deny himself;*" would recall the saddest, the most tragic and shameful, scenes in its brief history. Those who were strong in the faith would once more live through the agony with which they had witnessed some brother, weak but beloved, arraigned before the Imperial tribunal, and, under fear of death, prove himself unworthy of life eternal. The Roman court, with its inexorable magistrate, its armed lictors, its eager surging crowd of onlookers, would rise before their eyes once more. Once more they would burn with shame and grief and in-

dignation as they saw the poor craven turn traitor to Christ, and to himself and them, and fling away his immortal jewel to escape the sufferings of a day.

Nay, the prophetic words would call up a still higher tribunal, a court crowded with a multitude no man could number, a Judge as much more august as merciful, a session on which eternal issues hung: for those who had denied Christ before men were to be denied by Christ before the holy angels and the assembled world: and from his gentle yet awful lips the doom was to fall, "Depart from me, I never knew you!"

Could words such as these; words that called to remembrance the death of the Cross and the vow of Baptism, the daily death of persecutions and the bright reward of life everlasting, the renunciation of Christ by faint-hearted fearstricken converts who had brought shame on the Church and the solemn session in which the merciful Judge eternal was to renounce those who had renounced Him—could such words as these fail to strike the profoundest chords in the memories and hearts of men to whom these facts, these scenes, these prospects were the very stuff of daily experience, and on which, as they held, their very life and the life of the world depended? Should they not touch and move all that is deepest and best in us? Must they not, if we believe that Christ died for us, if we hope to live and reign with Him, if we know that we too shall stand before his bar, and be judged by our fidelity to the truths we have learned and the gifts we have received from Him? If we are not moved, the fault is in us, not in the prophetic

words. Our hearts must be dull and cold indeed if we can gaze without emotion on this procession of divine events which, starting from the Cross, moves on through all the labours, sorrows, and trials of time, to that great tribunal at which the dead, small and great, shall stand before the Judge of quick and dead, to receive according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or whether they be bad.

“Faithful is the saying, then, and worthy of all acceptance: For if we died with Christ, we shall also live with Him ; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him : if we should deny Him, He also will deny us ; if we are faithless, He abideth faithful ; for He cannot deny Himself.”

## XIX.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### IV.—THE CHRISTIAN CREED.

“But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life, according to hope. This is a faithful saying.”—TITUS iii. 4-8.

It is by no means certain that this melodious and pregnant sentence *is* one of the “faithful sayings;” for, as a rule perhaps, the formula, “Faithful is the saying,” precedes the citation of one of these prophetic utterances: while here, if this sentence be a faithful saying, the formula lags after it, instead of running before to prepare the way. But, if this be the rule, no rule is without exceptions. And in three cases, of which this is one, some very competent judges hold that the formula points backward, instead of forward. Assuredly the musical and matterful sentence I have just read to you sounds more like a prophetic saying, a saying universally admired and

approved, than the brief sentence which succeeds it,—“Those who believe in God should follow honest occupations,” though even this plain and unadorned maxim is not without its value, as I will try to shew you in my next Discourse. For the present let us give my text the benefit of the critical doubt ; let us assume that it is one of the faithful Sayings, and gather from it what were the doctrinal truths most commonly believed in the Apostolic Church.

If we *may* take this wonderful sentence as one of the household words of the primitive Church, it is beyond all comparison the most elaborate and exquisite of the whole series in form, as it is also the most rich, pregnant, and dogmatic in substance. Just as the laws, the statutes of Moses, became songs in the mouth of David and his fellow-psalmists, so, here, the truths believed on in the Church pass, on the lips of the Christian prophet, into a high poetic strain. The mere sound of the words is “most musical,” though not “most melancholy” : the voice takes measure and cadence as we recite them ; and the whole structure of the sentence betrays a poet’s hand. No doubt it was the exquisite beauty of its balanced clauses which, in part, fixed it in the memory and commended it to the acceptance of the first Christian disciples.

But, far more than for any literary or artistic excellence, they loved and cited it for its wide sweep of thought, for the large and sacred truths treasured up in this beautiful shrine. These truths, indeed, are so large, and so many, that we are tempted to turn from it in despair

of suggesting a tithe of its contents, in fear lest, while striving to bring out its rich doctrinal significance, its spirit and beauty should escape us. Almost every word, quite every clause, of the Saying furnishes a theme for protracted meditation.

Without further preface, then, let us address ourselves to our difficult task, and seek, first, to ascertain what are the truths which it states or implies ; and, second, what it was that gave these truths a special force and value to the Church of the Apostles.

I. (1) The first clause of this Saying runs :—“ *When the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared :* ” or, more literally and briefly, “ *When the benignity and philanthropy of God our Saviour appeared.* ” That is to say (if, at least, we draw out the contents and implications of the words “benignity” and “philanthropy”), the redemption of mankind had its origin in the benign regard of God for his creatures in general, and in his special and particular love for the creature He had made in his own image, after his own likeness. So that here, at the very outset, we have two of the fundamental truths of Religion : (1) that “the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all ;” and (2) that He does love us with a constant and singular affection.

Again, He is called “God *our Saviour*,” a title which many theologians virtually deny Him. *Christ*, they say, is our Saviour. By the sacrifice of Himself He appeased his Father’s anger against us, and delivered us from his wrath. Nay, replies the Prophet, the Father Himself is

our Saviour. It is from his kindness and love toward man that our salvation proceeds. He did not need to be reconciled to us, but we to be reconciled to Him, by being made aware of his love and grace for us.

Therefore his benignity and philanthropy "*appeared*" in Christ Jesus. The Greek word for "*appeared*" indicates that it is the *epiphany*, or the advent, of Christ which was in the Prophet's thoughts. It points to that supreme manifestation of the Divine Character which took place when the Son of the everlasting Father came and dwelt among us. In Him the kindness and love of God *advented*, shone forth, came into open manifestation, into clear view, that we might see them and be saved by them.

But if the kindness and love of God only *appeared* in Christ, then they always existed—existed and were at work for the good of man before Christ came into the world ; they still exist, and are at work for the good of those to whom his name and advent are unknown : just as the sun shines and helps to make the earth fruitful even when we cannot see it, by night as well as by day, when it is obscured by clouds as well as when it bursts through the clouds and irradiates the world with its splendours.

So that, even in the first clause of this Faithful Saying, no less than five great religious truths are stated or implied : (1) that God holds all his creatures in benign regard ; (2) that his love for man is peculiar and unique ; (3) that He is our Saviour, the Saviour of all men, and not merely an offended Ruler and Judge whose favour



must be purchased by sacrifice ; (4) that kindness and love are eternal attributes of his character, extending to all races, through all ages ; and (5) that these attributes shone out with a special and surpassing glory in the incarnation, in the life and work, of Jesus Christ. How, then, can we hope, in our brief space, to master and comprehend such a Saying as this, which holds "infinite riches in a little room" ?

(2) But glance at the second clause : "*Not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done, but according to his mercy, he saved us.*" The Divine benignity and love did not shine forth in Christ Jesus as a reward of the good works by which men had pleased God ; nor even to reward these works raised to their highest power and wrought in an element of "righteousness ;" *i.e.* with a clear knowledge of the Divine Will and a sincere and strenuous desire to conform to that Will. Such works, indeed, and those who do them, are always well-pleasing to Him ; for in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. And it may be kind and gracious of God to accept the obedience of man and its fruit in good works. But his kindness and love for man are specially revealed in this : that, not waiting for works of righteousness—"according to his mercy," moved only by *that*, He appeared in Christ Jesus to redeem us from evil and from evil works. He commendeth his love toward us, not by rewarding our goodness, but by making us good, by shewing us kindness when we were at enmity against Him, by quickening us to health while we were still

infected with disease, by making righteousness possible and attractive even to the unrighteous and profane.

Here, then, we have two other great truths to add to the five suggested by the first clause: *viz.* that works of righteousness are always acceptable to God; but that, in his mercy, He saves even those who have no such works to plead.

(3) But *how* are those who are unrighteous to be made righteous? The third clause replies: "*By the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*;" or, as St. John phrases it, by the baptism of water and of the Spirit. Now here, as in the Saying which we studied a week ago, the New Testament prophet lays a somewhat surprising emphasis on baptism. No commentator doubts that "the laver of regeneration" stands for the baptismal water and act. And, as I reminded you last Sunday, the primitive disciples thought much more of Baptism than we do. They believed that, in this sacrament, they "died with Christ," and rose with Him to a new, larger, and purer life. Some of them even held that, when once baptized, they could not sin, or that, if they did, every such sin was a mortal, an unpardonable, offence; and hence they often deferred baptism till they were about to die lest, by a single transgression they should shut themselves out from life everlasting. To them, baptism was no mere form, but a real spiritual transaction, the most solemn and momentous transaction of their lives. It was, in very deed, a dying to evil, and a rising into holiness.

And no wonder; for with "the laver of regeneration"

they associated "*the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*" And this association of thought, so strange to many of us, was based on the most sacred and impressive facts in the history of the Church. It was when the Lord Jesus came up out of the stream in which He had been baptized, that the heavens opened, and the Spirit came down upon Him like a dove. The thousands on whom the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost were forthwith baptized. When the Christian Jews of Jerusalem saw that the gifts of the Holy Ghost were poured out on the Gentile Cornelius and his household, they felt they could no longer "forbid the water," or say "that these should not be baptized;" and Peter, "remembering the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost," dared no longer withstand God. Throughout the sacred history, in short, we find baptism and the inward quickening of life by the Divine Spirit in close and constant association; the one is evidently regarded as the complement of the other. And it is to this connection of baptism and regeneration that the Christian prophet here refers. Whatever difficulty *we may* find in his words, the primitive Church would find no difficulty in them; they would only express one of its deepest and most assured convictions. So deep was the conviction, that to die without being baptized was superstitiously held to put one's salvation in peril: and hence, even in the Apostolic Church, there arose the custom of vicarious baptism, and living men were baptized for the believing but unbaptized dead.

And this much the Church still holds, *viz.* that if the benignity and love of God which appeared in Christ are really to save us from our sins, we must at least pass through that death to evil which baptism symbolizes, and be quickened to newness of life by the Spirit of all truth and grace.

(4) The Holy Ghost, by whom we are renewed in the spirit of our minds was, adds the Prophet, "*poured out abundantly upon us through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*" And here we can hardly fail to note that the very same epithet is applied to Christ which had been previously applied to God: He is called "*Christ our Saviour*" just, as in the first clause of the Saying, God Himself is called "*God our Saviour*;" the implication being, of course, that He who shares the titles of God, shares his nature also, that the man Christ Jesus is truly one with the Father.

Another notable and suggestive implication is that, while the Spirit of God was given to men before Jesus came, yet a richer, a more abundant, ministry of that Spirit is declared to have followed on the coming and work of Christ. The Spirit was given without measure to Him: and He Himself affirmed that it was expedient for us that He should go away in order that the Spirit, the Comforter, might come in some more marked and abundant way than heretofore. The Hebrew prophets looked forward to his reign as an age in which all sorts and conditions of men, rich and poor, old and young, bond and free, should have that Spirit poured out on them; and the Christian Apostles mark the fulfilment

of that prophecy in the miraculous effusion of the gifts of the Spirit during the early days of the Church's history. And thus the whole Bible confirms the Saying, that the Holy Ghost was "poured out on us *abundantly* through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

(5) If, last of all, we ask for what end have the kindness and love of God appeared, and the laver of regeneration been opened, and the Divine Spirit poured forth? the prophet of the Church replies: "*That, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs of eternal life, according to hope.*" If, then, confused by theological disputes, you should ask, What is justification? mark how clear and prompt an answer our Saying supplies. Those are justified who have believed in the benignity and love of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, who have died with Him to all things ill, and have been made alive by his Spirit to all that is good. Justification is no mere juggle, no mere imputation, no mysterious or forensic transaction in the bosom of the Sacred Trinity: it is the fine change in our attitude towards God and his Will which springs from a frank recognition of the love of our Father for us, from a sincere faith in the revelation of that love and kindness made in the Son, and from an inward quickening and renewal by the Holy Ghost.

Mark, also, that we are thus justified by the gracious energies of the whole Blessed Trinity in order "*that we should be made heirs*"—better, "*heritors,*" "*of eternal life:*" *i.e.* in order that the divine life of purity and love, the life which is independent of all the changes and accidents of time, may become ours. Ours *now*, in some

measure ; for " this is life eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent,"—so to know them that we become pure even as they are pure, kind even as they are kind, perfect even as they are perfect. And purity, charity, and at least those perfect aims which in due time make the perfect man, are possible to us even here and now. And yet, while we are bound by the fetters of time and sense, we cannot gain a full possession and enjoyment of life eternal ; we hold it "*according to hope*,"—having it in part indeed, but looking forward to the time when time shall be no more, when that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part shall be done away.

If, then, we now sum up what even this brief and inadequate study has taught us, we may say that we have found in this prophetic utterance no less than eleven of the great truths which lie at the basis, which are of the very substance, of the Christian Faith, and so have recovered, if not the formal creed of the Apostolic Church, at least most of the articles of which that Creed was composed. It is a creed which contains all that is essential to life and godliness, a creed of which no man need be ashamed, a creed which most of us would probably be far more willing to adopt than many of the later symbols and doctrinal formulas put forth by the Church, and imposed on all over whom she claims authority. For it runs thus, or may be put thus :—I believe (1) that He who made them all loves every creature He has made ; (2) and that He holds in a singular and fatherly affection the men whom

He made but a little lower than Himself ; (3) that He is Himself our Saviour and the Saviour of all men, and not simply an offended Judge whose anger must be appeased before He can shew his love for us ; (4) that his kindness and love extend to all ages and races, even to those who have not seen his glory in the face of Jesus Christ ; but (5) that this kindness and love rose to their supreme manifestation, their most glorious epiphany, in the advent and work of his beloved Son. I believe (6) that works of righteousness, all actions sincerely conformed to his will, whether that will be written on the tablets of the heart or on the sacred page, are always acceptable to God ; (7) but that, in his mercy, He makes those righteous who have no works of righteousness to plead on their own behalf ; and (8) that He makes them righteous by means of that spiritual death of which baptism is a symbol, and of that spiritual life which He pours out his Holy Spirit to quicken and sustain. And I believe (9) that while, apart from Christ, men may receive the illumination of that Spirit, we nevertheless owe to Christ the large regenerating influence which streams forth from the Church upon the world ; (10) that it is only as we are thus inwardly renewed, renewed in the spirit of our minds that we are justified with God ; and (11) that we are thus justified by the grace and Spirit of God in order that we may lay hold on eternal life, in part now, and in full hereafter.

II. That, surely, might well be pronounced a faithful Saying, and worthy of all acceptance, which enshrined

truths so many and so great in a form so lovely and musical that it lingers in the memory and on the ear. But even yet it may be doubted whether we have touched the secret of its wide influence, of the universal admiration it won. Sayings grow popular and pass from lip to lip, not so much because they express many profound truths, nor simply in virtue of any beauty of form, however exquisite ; but because they sweep the chords of rooted memories, stir the imagination, kindle hope. And to how much which they held dearest in the past, to how much on which imagination and hope might feed for the future, would this Saying appeal as it fell on the ears of Jews just delivered from their bondage to law and self-righteousness, or of Gentiles delivered from the still more cruel bonds of vice and superstition ? What more wonderful to a Jew than a God who loved all men, and not the elect race only ; and who saved them freely—not for works of righteousness which they had done, not for offerings and sacrifices, not even for acts of obedience and service, but simply because He was their Father, and loved them too well to let them perish in their sins ? What more surprising and pathetic to a Greek than that the crowded pantheon of his fathers should vanish to reveal the only wise and true God ; and that this sole King of heaven should clothe Himself with human infirmity and walk with men, not to give wisdom to the wise, nor to unfold his splendour to his ministers and devotees, and, still less, to gratify his caprice or his lust, but to draw all men unto Himself,



to give wisdom to the foolish, freedom to the enslaved, purity to the vile?

How, as they listened to such prophetic words as these, would both Jew and Gentile recall the supreme moment when, moved by the Holy Ghost by which they had been inwardly renewed, they had descended into the laver of regeneration, proclaiming themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto holiness, and had looked, not in vain, for some miraculous gift of the Spirit by which they might be assured of their personal acceptance with God, and be qualified for the service of the Church : the moment when, as they came up from the baptismal waters, clad in their new white garments, every one of them had a psalm, had a teaching, had a revelation, had a tongue, had an interpretation—all the wonders of Pentecost repeating themselves in every Congregation? With what sacred joy and devotion would they recall Jesus Christ the Saviour, in whose advent the kindness and love of God toward man appeared, to whose Spirit they owed their new life, and the infinite diversity of gifts, ministrations, operations, with which their new life was enriched and adorned? And, above all, as they felt that this new life was the germ of life eternal, and its springing powers but the rudiments of faculties which would unfold for ever in new variety and splendour ; as they realized that, for them, there was no more death, but the sure prospect of glory, honour, and immortality, how would their most sacred memories of the past blend with the brightest hopes for the future, and their spirits be rapt in an extasy of love and joy and praise?

We have but to remember that, for the most part, they were of the poor, the ignorant, the weak of this world, despised and banned by philosopher, and noble and priest ; we have but to remember what their life was like before they entered the gates of the Church—how dull, how sordid, how hopeless, and, to contrast with this, the animation and interest, the great thoughts, the good works, the kindling hopes, the happy fellowship of kindred minds, which they enjoyed now that they were new men in Christ Jesus, and believed that they held a faith in their hands which was capable of transfiguring the whole world ; we have but to draw this contrast in order to understand how their hearts would be touched by a Saying which gathered up into a few musical words all the truths by which they had been quickened and redeemed.

If *we* are not moved by this faithful Saying as they were moved, if its truths are not as vital and precious to us as they were to them, if it does not strike so many chords of memory and hope, that can only be because our very familiarity with "the good news of great joy" has dulled our sense of their value, has robbed them of their freshness and power. No truths can be of graver moment to us, none should win a response more quick and deep than these : that He who made us looks down on us with kind benignity and tender love, not because we are obedient and loyal to his will, but because He is full of all compassion ; that He has revealed his eternal loving-kindness for us in the man Christ Jesus, robing Himself in human form that we

might *see* how good and kind He is ; that He has founded a home, an asylum, a church, in which we may all meet and be at one and even the most sinful may find rest for their souls ; that in this Church He pours out in infinite variety the gifts of his Spirit in order that we may be inwardly renewed, trained for the life eternal, and sustained by the largest and brightest hopes. If we frankly and heartily believe these truths must we not be moved by them even when they are most simply expressed ? and much more deeply moved when they are expressed in a few, concise, but lovely phrases which haunt the ear like sweet harmony ?

This Saying is, as we have now seen, a body of divinity set to music. Shall we not gratefully confess that it is in very deed a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance ?

## XX.

### THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

#### V.—PRACTICE THE END OF DOCTRINE.

“Faithful is the saying—and these things I will that thou constantly affirm—that those who have believed in God should maintain good works.”—TITUS iii. 8.

A MORE idiomatic, and not less accurate, translation of these words would run thus :—“*Faithful is the saying—*and on this point I charge thee to speak out—*that those who have believed in God should follow honest occupations.*” But no translation will convey the full value of the Greek. For the verb I have rendered “follow” means much more than that only honest occupations are to be chosen by as many as believe in the God whose kindness and love toward man “appeared” in Jesus Christ our Saviour. It means that they are to study and ply their several callings with the diligence and ardour of a skilled craftsman whose heart is in his hand ; that they are to put their best work into it. And the words I have rendered “honest occupations” include, not only all

honourable vocations, up to that of a bishop, but also the pursuit of whatsoever things are reverend, just, pure, lovely, kind. And taken thus, in its full significance, the Saying becomes much more weighty and noble than it seemed to be at first, much more like one of those "faithful sayings" which gained universal acceptance in the primitive Church.

Its claim to that rank and honour has been disputed. More than once, indeed, when we meet the formula, "Faithful is the saying," it is not easy to decide whether we are to look before or after, whether the formula points back to the sentence which precedes it, or forward to the sentence which follows it. For St. Paul was himself a prophet, and the greatest of the New Testament prophets: and hence his own sentences are often as epigrammatic, or as poetical, as the sayings he quotes from the lips or writings of his brethren.

Nor do the ancient Greek manuscripts help us to determine the point. The most ancient and authoritative of them are written in capital (uncial) letters throughout. As many letters are put into a line as the line will hold. One word is not divided by a blank space from another, nor one sentence from another: and there are no stops. So that, to a certain extent at least, we have to feel our way to the meaning of any passage we are studying; to divide word from word, and sentence from sentence, to mark how the ablest translators and commentators have dealt with them: and to put in our stops where, on the whole, we judge they will most truly indicate the sense. Hence it now and then occurs that

even those who are most familiar with the style of St. Paul are perplexed, and can only say, "This is what we think he meant, but we cannot be quite sure." Now and then, too, it will happen that scholars and critics of equal force come to opposite conclusions, and we have to decide between them, or to confess that we cannot decide.

My text yields an illustration of this critical perplexity; and we shall soon meet with another. "*This* is a faithful saying," affirms St. Paul: and we cannot but ask, Which? that which goes before, or that which comes after? Is this the faithful saying?—"that those who believe in God should follow honest occupations:" or is it this?—

When the kindness of God our Saviour,  
And his love toward man, appeared;  
Not by works of righteousness which we ourselves had done,  
But according to his mercy, He saved us,  
By the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost,  
Which He poured out on us abundantly,  
Through Jesus Christ our Saviour;  
That, being justified by his grace,  
We should be made heirs of eternal life,  
According to hope.

This latter sentence is so noble and elaborate in structure, it sets to music so many of the fundamental verities of the Christian faith, there is such a swing and inspiration in it, that, naturally enough, many good critics have given it the preference over the shorter and simpler saying of the two. Yet the weight of critical opinion preponderates in favour of the less inspired looking

sentence. If the question were put to the vote, a majority of the most competent judges would say : “ *This* is the faithful saying, that those who believe in God should follow none but honest occupations.” And I think we may see that St. Paul himself casts his vote with them : for so important does he think this maxim that he both makes a break in it, in order to charge his friend Titus to speak out on this point, or to speak often, and reverts to it once more in Verse 14, where we read, “and let our people also follow honest occupations for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”

As, then, we have undertaken to study all the faithful sayings, we must include this also in the list, and set ourselves to discover what it means, and why it was deemed worthy of all acceptance.

1. Its first and simplest meaning lies on the very surface, and is of the gravest value. For that those who believe on God should engage in none but honest occupations, through a very simple inference from the character of the God in whom they believed, was a precept which could only be obeyed at much cost in the Apostolic Church. The slaves, labourers, artizans, peasants, who composed the bulk of that Church, lived in a very different world from ours : although, as you know, even in our English and Christian world, there are only too many occupations which are either flagrantly dishonest, or of a very questionable honesty. How many there were which were tainted by speculation or extortion, by lust or cruelty, in the ancient Roman, or in the ancient Asiatic, world, it would be impossible to

shew without lifting a veil which no decent hand would willingly touch. It will be enough to say that in the service of the temples and the arts, the amphitheatre and the arena, and even in the service of the public magistrates, there were hundreds of callings which so pandered to the vilest lusts, or so ministered to injustice and cruelty, that no man who loved God and his brother, no man who had named the Name of Christ, could continue in them for a moment.

Nay, more, the mere coming of the Christian Faith branded many of the most common and popular callings as "dishonest," which, before the advent of Christ, had been deemed innocent or laudable. It was not simply that no Christian could be a spy or informer, a ministrant in the temples, an actor, a gladiator, a lictor, a publican ; he could engage in no art or craft which ministered to the reigning superstitions of the time or to its common vices. He could accept no public office which involved the burning of incense to the Cæsar of the day. He could obey no command, whether of master or magistrate, which would make him untrue to God or to the pure commandments of Christ. Shut out from the public services, from the service of all which then usurped the name of Religion, and from the service of Art, he was also self-excluded from many of the handicrafts by which men won their daily bread. A silversmith, he could make no image of Diana, or of any other divinity of the Pantheon. A butcher, he could not work in the public shambles, since the meat sold there was generally consecrated to a god. A scribe, he must refuse to copy



the foul epigrams, tales, satires, which entered so largely into the popular literature of the times. A slave, he must risk the whip, the dungeon, the quarries, death itself, rather than comply with many of the demands which were almost sure to be made upon him. It was because obedience to Christ forbade them to take part in the full-fed and many-coloured riot of the senses, and that worship of all which appealed to sense, which men then mistook for the true end and chief good of life, that the early Christians were branded by their contemporaries as "unsocial," as "strangers in every city," and even as "enemies of the human race."

On the other hand, there was grave danger, as we learn from St. Paul himself, lest those who had been newly saved by Christ should lose touch with the common duties of life. For it was not at Thessalonica alone that recent converts were dazzled by the mysteries which had been revealed to faith. In many Churches there were those who looked for the speedy coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven; and who felt it impossible, with that bright revolution in the human story and in all the conditions of human life close at hand, to give themselves to the daily toils and cares by which men live. What need was there to devote, what sense was there in devoting, much thought and labour to the common round and daily tasks of life when, at any moment, the heavens might be rent by the descending throne of the true King of men, the whole air be filled with his glory, the whole earth be brought under his sway?

To men to whom so many callings had suddenly grown impossible, and to whom the daily drudgery of life seemed as unnecessary as it was unwelcome, it was most wholesome to be reminded, by those who knew more of the mind of Christ than they did, that as many as believed in God were bound, by their very faith in Him, to follow honest occupations, with their best industry and skill. There was grave need for Paul to charge Titus to speak out, to speak often and strongly, on a point so vital to the order and growth of the Christian community; grave need to say again and again, with the full force of Apostolic and prophetic authority: "None but honest occupations become Christian men;" but to say also, "Let every Christian man have some honest occupation, and discharge its duties with all diligence." Without such teaching as this, the Church of the Apostles might only too easily have sunk to the level of the vile crew who, making it their boast that they were Roman citizens, lived on the Imperial alms, found their occupation and delight in the Imperial shows and games, till the old Roman honesty and valour quite died out of them, and was replaced by a factious and mutinous spirit which made them the prey of every opulent political adventurer, and at last destroyed the noblest commonwealth the world had ever seen.

2. But the teaching of this Saying is equally wholesome, and equally pertinent, for *us*; or it becomes so the moment we take up another and a higher shade of meaning latent in it. For the word I have rendered "honest" (and which is commonly rendered "good")

always carries in it an implication which makes it difficult to translate by any single term. Its original meaning is "fair" or "beautiful," and it never quite loses this meaning. It always implies a certain comeliness or excellence in the object to which it refers. Just as our epithet "fair" means both "just" and "comely," or our epithet "good" may slip into "goodly," so also the Greek epithet has this twofold suggestion. As used here, therefore, it implies that the callings of Christian men must be not "honest" only, but also "honourable." And so the Saying comes to have weight and pertinence for us as well as for those who first believed. For though we all comprehend that no Christian man can follow any occupation which is openly dishonest, we may not have realized that none but honourable, none but morally beautiful, occupations are open to us, or we may not understand how every "honest occupation" may be raised into an "honourable vocation."

To *us*, therefore, the Faithful Saying means, "Let your daily calling be an honourable one," or, "Learn how to make it honourable." What *we* need to remember is, not that all dishonest or disgraceful vocations are forbidden us, but that any lawful vocation may be made honourable by the spirit in which we pursue it. For just as any honest calling may be made dishonest, and the most honourable dishonourable, by our want of integrity, our indolence, our perfunctory and negligent discharge of its duties, or by the selfish and mercenary heart we carry to it, so any honest calling may be raised into an honourable vocation if we pursue it in an

honourable spirit ; if, as this Saying bids us do, we "study and ply it with the diligence and ardour of a skilled craftsman whose heart is in his work."

No doubt there are callings to which we attribute special honour because they demand a good deal of culture, and high or rare capacity in those who follow them with success : as for example, the legal, medical, and clerical professions, or the vocations of the poet, the artist, the musical composer, the man of science, the man of letters, the publicist, the statesman. But

Honour and rank from no profession rise.  
Act well thy part : in *that* the honour lies.

We cannot all of us choose our calling ; nor can we all command either the culture or the capacity which would fit us for the more learned and honourable professions. But two things we can all do, two things we are all bound to do, if we believe in God and in Jesus Christ whom He has sent. We may *dignify* our calling, however humble it may be, by bringing to it an upright, diligent, and honourable spirit. And we may *hallow* our calling by bringing a Christian or religious spirit to it, the spirit of Him who, though the Ruler of all, was the Servant of all, who, though He was the Saviour of the world, was also a carpenter and a carpenter's son.

When will men learn that wages, not earned, are stolen ; that a working-man who shirks or scamps his work may be as much a thief as he who picks pockets, nay, that he is picking his master's pocket week by week ; and—lest I should be suspected of class animus, let me

add—that a minister who shrinks from the toil of strenuous thought and emotion, who does not give his people of his best or dare not preach what he knows to be true, robs the Church he professes to serve? When shall we all learn that the only way to bring dignity and sweetness into our daily lives is to devote our best industry and best skill to the daily tasks we have undertaken to perform? What satisfaction can any man have in a work which, if compulsion be necessary, he does not compel himself to take pride in and to do as well as he can? And what a noble satisfaction any man may win from his daily occupation if he does his best in it, if he determine to excel in it? Who does not honour an artisan who may always be depended on for doing his best and utmost with the means at his command? or a servant who can be trusted to look after the interests of her employer as though they were her own? It is not the nature of our calling, or its place on the social scale, or the amplitude of our outward conditions, on which our character and estimation depend, even in the eyes of men; but on the temper and spirit in which we pursue it. “Act *well* thy part: in that the honour lies.” So that there is absolutely no honest occupation, however lowly it may be, which we may not convert into an honourable vocation, if we devote ourselves to it in an upright, generous, and honourable spirit.

And there is no such occupation which we may not hallow, which we may not elevate and transform into a religious service, if only we bring a religious spirit to it: if we are not content with “eye service as men-pleasers”

but as the servants of Christ, do the will of God from the heart, with good-will doing service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men," because we know that whatsoever good stroke of work we do, He will take note of it and accept it as done for Him. For what vocation is there in which we may not shew diligence, integrity, consideration for others, patience, cheerfulness, kindness, and indeed all the fruits of the Spirit? What calling is there in which we cannot make men feel that we are actuated by the fear of God, and keep the pure and bright example of Christ before our eyes; that we are doing more and better than we should do simply to please men, or simply to get on, because we are bent on exercising ourselves unto godliness and proving ourselves true children of our Father in heaven? To do all we do as for his sake, this—as George Herbert long since taught us in his quaint verses—is the true "elixir" of life, that which gives it health, worth, beauty, joy. All we do may of Thee partake, he sings. Nothing can be so mean which, with this tincture (for thy sake), will not grow bright and clean. A servant, with this clause, makes drudgery divine. Who sweeps a room as for thy laws, makes both room and action fine.

This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold :  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told.

Any man who thus sets himself, without much prating or profession, to serve and please God in all the details of his daily work, cannot fail to bring a sacred peace and

dignity into his life, and to win respect for the Christian name.

3. But, finally, this Saying is capable of still another interpretation : for it immediately follows the noble creed which we studied last Sunday morning, the creed in which we found a whole body of divinity set to music (Verses 4-7). Viewed in the light of its context, it means that *Practice is the true end of all Doctrine*. It is as though the Apostle would say : " You believe that God loves all men with a fatherly and redeeming love ? You believe that He has given a supreme revelation of that love in the life, work, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ his Son ? You believe that He quickens us to trust and to respond to that love by the regenerating ministry of his Holy Spirit ? You do well. But in vain do you yield an intellectual assent and credence to the whole round of Christian doctrine, if you do not live by it and walk by it, if you do not prove your faith by your works. It is not enough that you consent to these truths as true, that you take delight in discussing them as abstract propositions, or in drawing from them beautiful theories of human life and conduct. It is not enough even that you teach them with all the eloquence, fervour, and emotion at your command. You must embody them in your daily life. You must act on them and illustrate them in your daily occupation. Better, far better, to be a saint, and set this great creed to the speaking music of a pure and holy life, than to be a prophet, and set it to the noblest words, or songs, which ever fell from inspired lips."

Now if we take the Saying thus, we see at once the secret of its power ; we learn what it was that gave it authority and acceptance in the Apostolic Church. For such of the members of that Church as were Jews could not but confess that, in the Rabbinical schools, Judaism had run to mere words, which had no influence on life and conduct ; while such of them as were Greeks could not but confess that, in the academies of the Sophists, Philosophy had also run into mere words, words which bred only intellectual questionings and strifes, words which had no power to touch and save the sinful world that ran to riot around them or to abate its wickedness. They must have felt that what the world wanted was life, not words ; pure examples, not windy speculations ; loving and helpful service, not new theories of ethics. Nay, we know that they did feel it ; that they took the counsel of the Apostle ; that they acted on the faithful saying which he declared to be a true and weighty utterance of prophetic wisdom. We know that they brought the great truths of their Creed into the common occupations and daily round of life, and thus produced their deepest impression on a corrupt and gain-saying generation. For hardly forty years after St. Paul wrote this Epistle, the accomplished Roman statesman Pliny wrote a letter in which he gave the earliest description which has come down to us from a non-Christian source of the very churches which the Apostle had founded : and in this letter he tells us how they “ assembled on certain stated days before it was light, and repeated in alternate verses with one another a hymn or form of prayer to Christ, as



to some God, *binding themselves by a sacrament*—not for any criminal purpose—but *to abstain from fraud, theft, and adultery, from falsifying their word, and from retaining what did not belong to them.*”

Now Pliny was an accurate observer, a competent judge ; and in his province (Asia Minor) the Christians were so numerous that, as he complained, the temples of the gods stood empty and deserted. But if you go to him for Christian doctrine, he can give you none but the divinity of Christ ; while if you go to him for Christian practice, he can tell you that the worshippers of Christ were just in their dealings, honest, chaste, truthful, and trustworthy. Obviously, therefore, what struck their heathen neighbours most in them was their “good works,” that they followed none but honest occupations, and followed them in a pure, honourable, and religious spirit.

And who can doubt that in proportion as we are animated by their spirit, we shall repeat the victory over the world which they achieved. Deeds speak louder than words, religious deeds than religious words. On points of doctrine and belief men are divided or doubtful. But all men agree on points of practice—at least so far as this, that they respect sincerity, honour loyalty to conviction, value honesty, truthfulness, purity, trustworthiness, and all the homely virtues which make life useful and sweet. And hence any man, any one of you, who succeeds in turning a humble but honest calling into an honourable vocation by his diligence, fidelity, and skill ; and then turns his honourable vocation into a

religious service by his loyalty to the truths he believes, will do more for God and man than if he spoke with the tongues of men and of angels, but had not the purity and the charity which are the very essence of pure and undefiled religion.

## XXI.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### VI.—GODLINESS AND GYMNASTICS.

“Exercise thyself unto godliness : for bodily exercise is profitable for a few things ; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.”—TIMOTHY iv. 7-9.

I SHEWED you in my last discourse how difficult it sometimes is, and why it is so difficult, to determine whether the formula, “Faithful is the saying,” points backward or forward, to the sentence which precedes it or to the sentence which follows it. And here, once more, we are confronted by that difficulty. It is impossible to be sure whether St. Paul intends us to find the faithful saying in Verse 8 or in Verse 10: in the words, “Bodily exercise is profitable for a few things, but godliness is profitable for all things,” &c. ; or in the words, “For to this end we both labour and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God who is the Saviour

of all men, specially of them that believe." The more numerous authorities are in favour of the former Saying, I think ; but the more weighty in favour of the latter. Here, therefore, as on a previous occasion, I must ask you to cut the critical knot we cannot untie, and to treat both these sentences as faithful, or prophetic, sayings : which we may do with a clear conscience if only we remember that, though only one of them can be a citation from some unknown prophet of the primitive Church, yet the other must be the work of St. Paul himself, who was not only a prophet, but the greatest of the New Testament prophets.

Let us, then, consider the earlier of these two Sayings to-day, reserving the latter for our next discourse.

"*Bodily exercise profiteth a little,*" or, "*for a few things ; but godliness is profitable for all things.*" What did St. Paul mean by "bodily exercise" ? Commentators have replied : "He meant the externals of Religion—processions, genuflexions, flagellations, fastings, whatever is merely outward or ritualistic in worship, whatever macerates or subdues the body." And it is quite possible that St. Paul had in his mind a sub-reference to the rules laid down for the mortification of the flesh, the discipline of the body, by the Gnostics, against whose "old wives' fables" and commands "not to marry and to abstain from meats," he had just warned his son Timothy. But his main reference, as the master-word of the whole passage indicates, was to those athletic exercises and sports by which the Greeks trained themselves in physical health and vigour and beauty, and rose to an unequalled

perfection of human strength and comeliness. For the word we render "exercise" is, literally, "gymnastic" (*γυμνασία*). So that, obviously, he is running a comparison between gymnastics and godliness, between the highest training of the body and the highest training of the soul. "Gymnastics," he says, "are good for a few things ; but godliness is good for all things ;" or, to draw out his comparison more fully : "Gymnastics avail for a few good ends in the present life ; but godliness avails for all good ends, both in the present life and in the future."

And, perhaps, the first thought suggested by this comparison to many of us will be the admirable simplicity and boldness with which the Apostle speaks of the most sacred verities. If, for example, any one but St. Paul had compared Inspiration to Intoxication, how many would have pronounced the comparison vulgar, if not profane ! Yet in the most natural way, without the faintest sense of irreverence, he exhorts the Ephesians (v. 18), "Be not drunk with wine, but be ye filled with the Spirit." If any one but St. Paul had compared godliness with athletic exercises, and had implied that godliness was a kind of spiritual gymnastic, how many would have been shocked and offended ! Assuredly many modern teachers have been gravely called to task for utterances not half so bold. And yet he, one of the truest gentlemen as well as an inspired Apostle and prophet, uses this great plainness of speech without a thought of shame. My brethren, it is well that we should cultivate purity and refinement both of thought and

of speech. But when we grow precise and prim, when we affect a modesty greater than that of the Bible, a delicacy which is shocked by its plain language and bold comparisons, we may be sure that our precision is a sign of mental weakness rather than of mental culture and health, that our prudery betrays a prurient imagination rather than a pure heart.

For the last quarter of a century we in England have been learning to place a greater value on athletic exercises and sports, till now, in some cases at least, they are pursued with that eagerness which foredoes itself. At our Universities, for example, you may find many young men who devote far more attention to their muscles than to their brains, to training than to culture and scholarship. And here, in Nottingham, I suppose, there are many lads, many men even, who would rather take "the leger" in a County cricket match, or pull the best oar on the Trent, the Isis, or the Cam, or carry off the Queen's prize at Wimbledon, than acquaint themselves with the best thoughts of the Wise, or master the open secrets of natural science, or acquire the art of carrying comfort and hope to the deject and wretched: while all over England there are young ladies who slave at "lawn tennis" as if it were a good work or a liberal education. But whatever the footing gymnastics have obtained in England, they are nothing to us as compared with what they were to the ancient Greeks. With them, Education consisted of three parts—grammar (or language), music (under which term they included poetry, or musical speech), and gymnastics; and of the three

the last occupied more of the time and attention of a Greek youth than both the others put together. Indeed this part of his education was never finished ; for, up to old age, he still frequented the gymnasia, took his lessons, went through his exercises ; though, as hoary hairs came upon him, his training was, naturally, made less severe and fatiguing. In every city there was at least one gymnasium, often covering acres of ground, with its stately halls, ample arenas, pillared aisles and porticoes, hot and cold baths, running-path, and all other necessary appurtenances. The most eminent statesmen, the most distinguished sages, studied the athletic art from the medical, military, æsthetic, and political points of view, and laid down rules of exercise or invented games by which they hoped to cultivate the health of the citizens, the equal and comely development of every limb and organ of their bodies, and to fit them for the service of the State. Not only were the gymnasia schools of dancing, wrestling, running, leaping, drill, and an infinite variety of sports ; they were provided with skilled and experienced adepts who lectured on temperance, on medicine, on military art : and they were the habitual resorts of statesmen, philosophers, and orators, who talked freely with all who flocked round them as they paced the porticoes or lounged in bath or hall. In short, the Greeks endeavoured at all costs to give, and to acquire, a healthy and vigorous physique ; mainly, however, because they believed the health of the mind to depend on that of the body. And, beyond a doubt, their supreme physical

health and beauty, and that energy and elasticity of mind which still render their oratory, their poetry, their architecture and statuary, at once the wonder and the despair of all who love and practise these arts, are largely to be attributed to their singular and scientific devotion to bodily exercise.

Yet, much as the Greeks confessedly gained by their noble physical training, St. Paul appears to speak of it with a certain contempt. It is good "for a *little*," he admits, good "for a *few* things," but only for a few. Such a tone would find but small sympathy with most Englishmen, to say nothing of the Greeks, unless, indeed, there was special and grave reason for taking it. *We* feel how much we lose, how much the nation loses, for want of a more scientific physical culture; how much we gain by the somewhat irregular and partial physical training some of us receive from walking, climbing, riding, boating, cricketing, cycling, volunteer drill, and other sports and exercises. But St. Paul *had* grave reason for regarding even the more perfect "gymnastic" of the Greeks, not with contempt alone, but with burning indignation and shame. Long before his time, as we learn from their own writers, the gymnasias had become the haunts of all the idle and vicious loungers of the Greek cities. From schools of manly training and education they had sunk into mere places of amusement in which the basest passions, and even nameless lusts, were freely indulged. The Greeks of St. Paul's day were the slaves of Rome. They had sunk into slaves very mainly because they had aban-



doned the severe physical culture of their fathers, the hardy and virtuous habits of an earlier time ; just as in later ages the Romans themselves, enervated by luxury and vice, became effeminate, and sank into the slaves, panders, and parasites of the more manly and vigorous races of the North.

We are not to understand the Apostle, therefore, as hinting dislike or casting contempt on any manly exercise by which the body is trained into a healthy and capable minister of the soul. What he scorns is luxury, effeminacy, vice. But we *are* to understand him as affirming that a true spiritual discipline is a far higher and nobler thing than physical training, even when that training is at its best. We *are* to take him as affirming that godliness is itself a gymnastic, and a gymnastic which serves far more good and enduring ends than any system of bodily exercise, however scientific and profitable it may be.

"O, of course," you say, "no one would think of denying that it is better to be a good man than a strong and dexterous man : we need no Apostle to teach us that."

Well, I suppose no one *would* deny that it is better to be good than strong. Nevertheless, we may sorely need an Apostle to remind us of that fact. For many of us give much more thought and pains to acquiring, or maintaining, health and strength than we do to the acquisition of godliness or to growth in it. You, young men, do none of you study and strive more to get your cricketing, skating, boating, than you do to secure a wise religious training, or to exercise yourselves in

purity and holiness of life? You, men of business, who do not care so much for exercise and sport as you did once, do you not take much thought for your digestion, for what you shall eat, drink, and avoid, or for the doctor you shall consult in order to regain or preserve your health? Do you take as much thought, exercise as much self-denial, go to as great an expense, to instruct yourselves in the will of God, to feed and breathe your spiritual faculties, to draw your lives into harmony with the example of Christ, as you do to securing the sanitary conditions of your offices and rooms, to furnishing your tables with suitable and generous fare, to arranging for the holiday rest and amusement which you require? When you send your boys and girls to school, are you as careful to bring them under good religious influences as you are to see that they have wholesome food, and good teaching, and wise liberal arrangements for the table, the dormitory, and the playground?

It may reasonably be doubted whether every man, or even every Christian man, practically holds "godliness" to be as important as "gymnastic" for himself and for his children. And assuredly it will not be wise of any of us to assume that *we* do so, without a careful and searching self-examination.

But even if we do, we are very far from having reached the standard of St. Paul. For he maintains that godliness is infinitely *more* important than good physical training: he maintains that to exercise oneself in godliness is good for all good ends, present and to

come ; while wholesome training for the body is good only for a few good ends in the present life. And if you consider what godliness is, and implies, I do not see how you are to question his conclusion.

Godliness is *godlikeness*, conformity to the Divine character and will, of which we have our highest type and example in Him who was "God manifest in the flesh." It does not consist simply, or mainly, in holding right views about God, about the Trinity, about the Atonement. It consists, rather, in a life the spirit of which has been caught from Him in whom all the glory of God revealed itself in all the virtues of manhood ; a life ever moving on into new purity, charity, righteousness, and perfection, because ever moving into a closer fellowship with Him. To live that life was an effort, an *agony*, even to the Man Christ Jesus. Day by day He had to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself, to see his work thwarted or retarded by the indifference or the enmity of the very men He came to save and bless, to withstand the assaults and wiles of the devil, to learn obedience by the things which He suffered. Night by night He had to make supplication, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him, to renew his ebbing strength by communion with his Father in heaven. And can *we* descend into the arena in which He overcame, and run the race which He won and endure the hardness which He despised, without an effort and a strife that will tax as well as brace all our energies, without incurring a pain, a suffering which can only make us perfect as it is borne with patience, con-

stancy, and a brave and cheerful courage? "Will the world that frowned on Him wear only smiles for us?" Will the powers of evil which ventured to assail Him shrink from an encounter with us?

Both as matter of reason and matter of experience, we know very well that godliness is the most difficult of all attainments, that it is the *sum* of all attainments. We know that even to rise to such poor and imperfect conceptions of the Divine Character and Will as we have gathered from the life of Christ, *and to be true to them*, demands a daily-renewed endeavour which tasks all the powers and faculties of the soul. We know only too well that this part of our education is never finished; that, however high we climb, the feet of our Guide are still high above us: that, if we would follow Him, we must for ever forget the things which are behind and press forward to the things which are before. With aching limbs and weary feet, and often with eyes so thick with tears that we can hardly discern our Guide, we have day by day to "bend ourselves against the steep," hardly conscious that the view grows broader and the air more bracing as we ascend.

And if we know that godliness involves a constant and strenuous exercise and strain, do we not also know that only as we devote ourselves to it can we rise into our true life and blessedness? *Is* not godliness gain, and the greatest of all gains,—having which, all is well with us, while, having it not, nothing can content us? *Has* it not a promise for the life that now is, and for that which is to come?

What do we live for now and here? Why do we pursue wealth so eagerly, or culture, or amusement, or the goodwill of our fellows? Is it not because we are seeking rest, gladness, peace, for these restless and craving hearts of ours? because we are seeking a satisfaction which will still all the hungers of the soul, and fill our prospect with motion, colour, beauty, and an unwearying charm? What do we hope for in the life to come? Is it not still rest, gladness, satisfaction, peace? It is not gold for its own sake, nor pleasure, nor even truth or wisdom, for its own sake, that we crave. We crave them for what they will make of us, and what they will do for us; because we long to be delivered from suspense, from uncertainty, from fear of change, from want and folly, from the scorn or the pity of men, and from our own proper scorn. It is happiness, satisfaction, blessedness, that we really aim at in all our pursuits; that is to say, it is goodness, or godliness. For what will deliver us from the fear of want, of change, of loss, if not the conviction that the Ruler of the Universe is our Friend, and that therefore all its laws and forces are working together for our good? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," a simple and genuine faith in God as our reconciled and loving Father; as sending life or death, loss or gain, as may be best for us, and for all; as making all things, things present and things to come, ours, because we are his.

And though as yet we have not reached a faith so pure and simple, or are very apt to let it slip from us just when we want it most, who will affirm that it is im-

possible to us? There have been times when even we have tasted of its sweetness, and have been upborne by its strength. For which of us has not at times trusted in God when trust was hard, or suffered to ease another's pain, or made a sacrifice to supply a neighbour's want? And when we have thus shewn ourselves to be children and imitators of God, have we not known an inward satisfaction and rest far keener and more sustaining than any of the joys of sense or of worldly success? Which of us has not known at least a few poor men and women, dwelling on the verge of want, or lying on the rack of pain, in whom religion was a sacred reality, a divine energy and solace? who possessed, and made us feel that they possessed, the true wealth, an eternal joy, the peace that passeth all understanding? Have not these pious and gentle souls, as they stood facing all that we most dread with an unfaltering patience, a sweet and humble content, or a cheerful courage which seemed beyond the reach of fear, taught us more both of God and man, and of God's power to enrich and sustain man, than all our other teachers, and influenced us much more healthily and profoundly? If we had to change places with any of our neighbours, should we not turn without hesitation from the gay, the opulent, and even from the wise, to the poor in spirit and pure in heart who have risen through much tribulation into the kingdom of heaven, into the service and fellowship of God, and who are in very deed citizens of heaven even while they walk the earth? Is not "the secret of the Lord," the secret of all life and truth and blessedness,

with these meek confessors who, having nothing, yet have all, and whose very sorrows, since they are a discipline of holiness, are turned into joy?

I do not doubt, my brethren, that as you recall the genuinely good men and women you have known, you admit "godliness to be profitable" unto all the things which it most behoves a man to pursue or to possess. You confess that it has God's promise both for the life that now is and for that which is to come, and that his promise is amply redeemed. You feel that you would do anything, and give anything, to make it your own, to enter into a blessedness which you so sincerely admire.

But what *have* you done? how much have you given or sacrificed, in order to win that godliness which you confess to be the true secret of life? No day passes without bringing you manifold opportunities of exercising yourselves unto godliness, of practising yourselves in obedience, in trust, in charity? How many of these opportunities have you redeemed? Do you take thought and pains to hold daily converse with the wise and good, to read some book, or listen to some teacher, by whose words you will be trained in the knowledge of the Divine Will? Do you daily hold converse with Him who is the very Fountain of all truth and wisdom and goodness? Do you carry your religious convictions into your daily work and business? are you true to them under all temptations, at all costs? Do you daily devote time and labour to the instruction of the ignorant, the strengthening of the weak, to assisting the needy and comforting the sorrowful? Do you earnestly endeavour

to catch and breathe the spirit of your Master in your social intercourse and in the judgments you pronounce on your neighbours? Do you carry a bright and cheerful spirit into the inevitable pains, vexations, and losses of life, and so shew not simply that you can endure them, but that you are enduring with Christ? By your moderation, goodwill, generosity, and cordial kindness in prosperity, do you daily prove that you take all you enjoy as the immediate gift of God, and know that you can make none of his gifts your own save as you share them with your fellows?

If you do, you are exercising yourselves in godliness, and have no doubt found that it is in very deed good for all things. If you do not, be the more earnest to redeem the time, and the opportunities of the time, which remain to you. Take the world for your gymnasium, and godliness for your daily exercise. But do not talk of doing *anything* and giving *anything* to become like those you most reverence and admire, while you neglect to give the service and make the sacrifices which God asks of you day by day. It is the daily exercise, the constant and graduated training, that tells. And if your hearts be set on this daily training and exercise, no hour passes in which you may not engage in it. For the godliness which is profitable for all things is possible in all things, since we may still be serving God, and growing like Him, in all we do.

If any of you younger men desire more definite directions, I will venture to offer you two, much as I prefer to deal with principles rather than with maxims.



You are at an age when the physical passions are so strong that they are apt to degenerate into lusts, and you are strongly tempted to that vulgar and lawless indulgence of them which, more than aught else, coarsens, pollutes, and enfeebles both body and soul. If you would not bring on yourselves a lifelong punishment, be on your guard against these temptations. Strive and pray against them. It is only the pure in heart who see God, and, seeing Him, are changed into his image.

And, again, you are at an age when bodily exercise, when all athletic sports and amusements, are most useful and most attractive. Do not suffer them to be *too* attractive. Do not make a toil of them, or suffer them to call you away from any higher duty, from *any* duty. Remember that even in training the body, you may also train the soul. There is a Christian, *i.e.* there is a manly and a gentlemanly, way of playing at any game, as there is also an unmanly, ungentlemanly, and therefore an un-Christian way. He who is thinking only of himself, and his own amusement or "profit," who plays only for self-exhibition, and self-indulgence; he who even in seeking his own ends, is not seeking to recruit health, to train the body into a more capable and willing minister of the mind and the spirit, and to fit himself for the real tasks of life, robs bodily exercise even of the few things for which it is good. Courtesy, consideration for others, justice, charity, obedience to rule and recognized authority, may be shewn in any game worth playing. And he who shews them may not only secure the few ends for which bodily exercise is profitable, but

may also be exercising himself in the godliness which is profitable unto all things. Cultivate and cherish this spirit, then, and so hallow and turn to spiritual profit your very sports and games.

If on our daily course our mind  
Be set to hallow all we find,

the trivial round of amusements as well as the graver tasks of life "will furnish all we need to ask," room to deny and to train ourselves, "a road to bring us daily nearer God."

## XXII.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### VII.—THE GENERAL SAVIOUR OF MANKIND.

“Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation : For this we both labour and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe.”—I TIMOTHY iv. 9, 10.

No candid student of the Word will deny that, here at least, St. Paul's trumpet gives a somewhat uncertain sound ; a sound so uncertain that those who “prepare themselves for battle ” cannot be sure whether he is for them or against them. Even those who contend that the vast majority of men will be lost can hardly rely on a passage which affirms God to be, at least in some sense, the Saviour of all men. Even those who somehow trust that all men will be saved can hardly claim as conclusive a passage which makes God the Saviour of those who believe in another sense to that in which He is the Saviour of all.

And yet the general intention of the passage, whether

as it fell originally from the lips of the Christian Prophet, or as it is here quoted and applied by St. Paul, does not seem difficult to recover. And, perhaps, if we recover its original meaning, and the use to which it was first applied, we may be the better able to determine its bearing on our modern controversies and perplexities.

1. As framed by the original Prophet, this fine, this faithful, Saying seems to have meant little, if anything, more than that the God, who had long been known as the Redeemer of the Jews, was now revealed to faith as the Redeemer of the whole world. If we paraphrase it so as to bring out the connotations and implications of the Greek words, it may run thus. "This is why we *labour*, labour even to weariness, and this why we *strive*, why we 'agonize' as men engaged in the contests of the arena; *viz.* because we have set our hope, once for all, on the *living* God—'living' as compared with dead idols, or the thin and bloodless abstractions of the Schools; who is now the Saviour, not of the Jew alone, nor of us alone who already believe on Him, but of all men, men of every race and kindred and tribe; who loves them as He loves us; who is seeking them as He sought us when once we too were lost; and, seeking to quicken them unto life eternal as He quickened us when we too were dead in trespasses and sins." This paraphrase, I confess, seems to exhaust the original contents of the Saying; nor do I think we have any right to affirm that the Prophet to whom we owe it had *the ultimate issue* of the Divine salvation, the ultimate

fate of the human race, distinctly before his mind, or that he intended to pronounce any deliberate verdict upon it.

And in proportion as you are familiar with the conditions of the Primitive Church, and with the tone of thought which prevailed in it, you will feel, I think, that this was meaning enough to make the Saying a very noble and precious one. You will feel that, thus limited even, it threw some of the simplest and most fundamental articles of the Christian creed, some of the ruling and deepest convictions of the Christian Church, into a happy and portable form ; and would be sure to command a wide, if not universal, acceptance, as a faithful expression of them. To men who had lived so separate a life as the Jewish members of the Church, and had begun to feel, as many of the best Jews of the time had begun to feel, that their singularity and isolation was a barrier and a hindrance, if also a privilege ; to its Gentile members who had been divided from each other by rival divinities, by different customs and creeds, and who were beginning to suspect that "great Pan," with all the other *immortals*, "was dead,"—the conviction that there was but *one* God for all men ; that this God was a *living* God, over whom time and the changeable thoughts of men had no power ; and that this living God was a *Saviour* who could really help them, and help them where they most needed help, by taking away that brooding sense of sin and that awful looking for of judgment by which the prophetic soul of the world was then oppressed : this catholic and reconciling conviction,

I say, could not fail to be most welcome to every generous and aspiring spirit, whether of Jew or of Gentile.

Despite its general culture, despite the fair and noble speculations of its best minds, the antique world was not unlike some of those lovely islands in the Southern Seas, where every tribe has its own gods, its own customs, its own moral standard and form of piety; and where, alienated from each other by that which ought to bind them together, their very Religion becomes a new and perpetual source of strife; where tribe is for ever making war on tribe; the priest or chief of to-day may to-morrow become a slave, and men's hearts are shaken and tormented by a constant sense of fear and insecurity. And, hence, the Faith which made them all *one*, one in worship, in creed, in morals, in customs, and made them all *safe* in the care of a living God who loved them all, and could save them all, was a veritable gospel, and brought them good tidings of the purest joy. It was because this gospel was summed up in the Saying of my text that it took rank among the faithful sayings of the Church, and was deemed worthy of all acceptance.

2. St. Paul's application of this Saying appears to be equally plain and obvious. He was exhorting Timothy to "exercise"—to "*gymnasticize*"—himself unto "godliness;" for, while he admitted that "bodily exercise," *i.e.* the physical training of the gymnasium, was profitable for a few things, he maintained that "godliness was profitable for all things, having promise both of the life which now is and of that which is to come." And, as he writes, there

recurs to his memory the prophetic Saying which bade all who had set their hope on God as the Saviour of all men "*toil and agonize*" in his service, that their hope might be fulfilled. The quotation was suggested, I suppose, by the Greek terms for "toil" and "agonize," terms of frequent use in the gymnasium, and one of them at least drawn directly from the arena. And he quotes this Saying in order to shew that it is "*for this,*" viz., to attain the godliness he had been enforcing, that those who hope in God labour even to weariness, and strive even to agony. It is because the Saying fits in with and confirms his previous thought that he cites it here; because it bears out the point he is contending for,—that godliness is profitable for all things, things present and things to come: and *not* because he is bent on proving the universal scope of the Divine redemption. *That* is not his theme just now; and probably he only writes down the words, "God is the Saviour *of all men, specially of believing men,*" because, having begun the quotation, he feels bound by his good literary conscience to carry it on to the end.

Not that he had any doubt, or misgiving, as to the truth which the Saying, taken as a whole, or taken by itself, affirms. He would not have quoted it all if he had not agreed with it all. And, indeed, from his other writings it is easy to see that he not only believed in the great reconciling truth, that there is but one God, and this God a living God, and this living God the Saviour of all men; but that he rejoiced and exulted in it as heartily as any other of the New Testament prophets.

Nevertheless, this is not the main truth to which his mind is turned here. And, however much we value that truth, we must frankly admit that, here at least, it is not uppermost in his mind, that it only comes in incidentally and by the way.

If from that admission any man cares to infer that St. Paul did not deliberately sanction the hope that all men will be saved at the last, let him draw his inference, and rejoice in it if he can : something, no doubt, may be said in its favour. If any man cares to infer from this admission, that a writer's beliefs are most surely indicated by his incidental assumptions and allusions, by the things which he takes for granted and does not stop to argue about, let him, too, enjoy his inference in peace : something, and even much, may be said in its favour. But if we care to find the truth, rather than to find the truth on our side, let us frankly admit that St. Paul quotes the Saying, *not* to confirm the prophetic hope of a salvation as wide as the world, but to shew the worth of godliness, its power to build up, to train and develop, the energies of the spiritual life. For how can we expect to arrive at the real meaning of any Scripture, if we do not deal honestly with it, if we try to squeeze out of it an intention, or a testimony, which it does not fairly carry ?

If, then, we deal fairly and frankly with this Saying, we shall confess that there is no grave difficulty in reaching its significance, whether as it fell from the lips of the New Testament prophet, or from the pen of the inspired Apostle. As uttered by the Prophet, it threw into a simple and memorable form the deep catholic



conviction which, to the primitive disciples, was as life from the dead ; that there is but one only and living God, who is to *all* the kindreds of the divided earth what Jehovah was to the Jews ; who is, in other words, the Saviour and Redeemer of all men. As cited by the Apostle, it was mainly intended to confirm his assertion, that godliness is the true gymnastic, the exercise which most effectually and happily trains all the energies and capacities of man that he most needs to have at his command, whether in the present or in the future life ; and only corroborates the hope of a universal salvation indirectly and by the way. Hence I never have quoted and never mean to quote—and permit me to warn you against quoting—this passage as a proof passage ; but simply as one of many *which can be most naturally and easily interpreted* when it is taken in the Universalist sense ; when we find in it a hint, rather than a proof, that it is the good purpose of the Almighty to shew Himself as truly a Saviour to all men ultimately as He is already to as many as believe.

3. But I would not be unmindful, nor would I have you unmindful, that the Prophets were often wiser than they knew, and said more than they meant, though not more than the Spirit by whom they were inspired meant them to say. And there are so many other passages in the New Testament which plainly declare that all men are embraced in the love of God, and embraced in the saving purpose of that love, that we are warranted in reading this passage in the largest sense of which it is capable.

Of what sense is it capable, then? The difficulty of the passage lies, of course, in the affirmation that, while God is the Saviour of all men, He is in some special way the Saviour of believing men; and cannot therefore, say some, be the Saviour of all in the same sense, to the same extent, in which He is the Saviour of the faithful. *Where* lies the difference, then? *What* are the two senses in which God is our Saviour?

We all know the sense in which He is the Saviour of the faithful. We know that, if we truly believe in Him, and have set our hope on Him, He not only forgives our sins, but takes away our sins, cleanses us from all unrighteousness by a gradual process of renewal, gives us a new mind and a new heart, and at last makes us righteous even as He Himself is righteous. But is this the sense in which He is also the Saviour of all men? or anything like this? "O, dear no! He does not even begin to be the Saviour of most men in this sense," we are told: "for He does not forgive their sins, much less take them away." In *what* sense, then?

In this sense, we are told. He has given his law to all; He has given his Son for all: He sends his Spirit to strive with all. He is, says Bishop Wilkinson, "the Author of an universal salvation" in the sense that all may be saved if they will: which is much like saying that a man of letters is the author of an universal book, *if any one cares to read it*. "If," said good Dean Alford, "God is willing that all should be saved, how much more shall He save those who trust in Him?" But does mere willingness to save make a Saviour? Does

merely providing the means of salvation make a Saviour? If I am willing that you should be rich, will you thank me for having enriched you? If even I were to give you a good start, to put the means of getting rich in your way, would you even then say that I had made you rich? In our ordinary language, assuredly, neither a benevolent will *which does not take effect*, nor a benevolent provision *which is not carried out*, would constitute a man a saviour of his fellows. Why, then, should it make God a Saviour? Would Moses have been called the Saviour of Israel, if he had not led Israel up out of Egypt, but had only wished that they might be free, or had simply organized an insurrection which failed, and failed very mainly because he did not throw his whole energy into it?

Those who thus evade the difficulty of this Saying under a cloud of theological verbiage, however, are not content—as how should they be content?—with the quasi-solution they offer us. As a sample of the straits to which they are reduced, suffer me to quote a brief extract from one of the latest and best commentaries on this Epistle, which begins boldly enough indeed, but ends in an unconditional surrender of the whole position. Speaking of my text the Commentator<sup>1</sup> says: “These words have often been pressed into the service of kindly but *mistaken* interpreters, *who ignore or explain away the plain doctrine of Holy Scripture* which tells us that there are those whose destruction from the presence of the Lord shall be everlasting, whose portion shall be the

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Ellicott's *New Testament Commentary*.

‘second death.’” He then proceeds to remind us, as I have already reminded you, that there were many Jews in every Christian congregation who thought the mission of the Messiah would be confined to the Jewish race, and to suggest that this prophetic Saying was intended to correct their narrow and selfish conceptions of the scope of Christ’s work. But, after making this helpful suggestion, he plunges into the following astonishing conclusion: “Still, with all these guarded considerations, *which seem to warn us from entertaining any hope of a universal redemption*, such a saying as this seems to point to the blessed Atonement mystery as performing a work *whose consequences reach out beyond the limits of human thought, or even of sober speculation.*” But, surely, no member of that kindly but mistaken school of interpreters, who ignore or explain away the plain doctrine of Holy Scripture, ever went beyond this conclusion, even in his dreams. An atoning work whose “consequences reach out beyond the limits of human thought” is hardly a sober speculation. For as we *can* think of a universal redemption, and even venture to hope for it, a redeeming work which transcends those limits must be even more than universal in its scope, and quite outruns all bounds of speculation!

But the more sober and consistent members of this austerer (for I do not care to call it “*unkindly*”) school are content to affirm, that the contents and intention of the Faithful Saying are exhausted by the two admissions: (1) that it is God’s will that all men should be saved, that none should perish; and (2) that He has provided

a salvation equal to the needs of all. Yet, surely, it does not take a logician, it takes nothing more than a little common sense to detect the flaws in their argument. For what can be plainer, on their assumption (that the unbelieving will never be really saved at all) than (1) that if it be God's will that all men should be saved, then God's will will not be done—hardly a *pious* conclusion; and (2) that in providing a salvation for all, God has been unthrifty, has lavished labour and love on an end which will never be accomplished, and has wholly departed from that "wise œconomy" and "nice adaptation of means to an end" which we are assured is a recognized feature of all his ways, and can never be sufficiently admired!

If, then, we are driven beyond their position, and driven by the very impiety of the conclusions which it involves, where can we stop short until we reach "the larger hope," until we trust that somehow evil will be overcome of good in all at the last, until we believe that God's will *will* be done, and all men be saved unto life eternal?

On that assumption the significance of our Saying becomes clear and radiant, but, so far as I can see, on no other. Nor is there any difficulty in shewing what the distinction is which it draws between all men and believing men. Is there not an obvious, and a vast, difference between them? Is it hard to distinguish the difference between those who know the joy of a present salvation from evil and those who have not that joy, who, though they also *may* be saved by the grace of God at some distant day, indulge no hope of his

salvation, and do not even desire to be delivered from the burden and bondage of their sins? Does it take abnormally keen eyes to discern the difference between those who *are* aiming at righteousness and perfection, and those who are *not*; between those who trust in the redeeming mercy of God and those who do not? If godliness is profitable for all things both in the life which now is and in that which is to come, do they lose nothing who lose that profit, lose the true use and enjoyment of all things, in the present life, and, for aught we know, may continue to lose it for long ages in the world to come? Is there no difference, or a difference hard to recognize, between free men who breathe the sweet air of righteousness and charity and call all things theirs, and men who *may be* set free some day, but meantime are shut up in darkness, "bound in affliction and iron" till the iron of their fetters rust into their very souls?

God is the Father, as well as the Saviour, of all men. His fatherly relation to us does not depend on our recognition of that relation. But no man will ever get the full good and comfort of that relation until he has recognized it, until he knows, until he takes and accepts, God for his Father, until he learns to trust and obey Him, and comes to be of one will and one heart with Him. If I were to say, "God is *the Father* of all men, specially of them that believe," would you find any insuperable difficulty in my saying, or be driven to conclude that God was *not* the Father of those who do not believe, in any true or real sense of the word

"father"? Why, then, should we find an insuperable difficulty in the faithful saying of the Christian prophet, or infer from it that God is *not* a real Saviour to the vast majority of men?

God is *your* Saviour, my brethren, whether you believe Him to be your Saviour or not; for your unbelief cannot make his relation to you of none effect. But you cannot get the full good and comfort of his redeeming, any more than of his fatherly, relation to you until you recognize and respond to it. In many the recognition comes late, too late; which means that they deprive themselves of all the best "profit," all the truest and sweetest uses, of this present life. In many the recognition *may* come after this life is wholly wasted, after a hopeless death, and even after a long experience of toil and agony beyond death, to which the labour and strife by which godliness may now be won is but as a drop in a bucket. For godliness, which is only another name for salvation, can never be *given* unless it is also *taken*. And for those to *take* godliness who have long been without God, or have long been at enmity against Him, must involve an agony which transcends all thought. If you would spare yourselves that agony, exercise yourselves unto godliness now, while it is still called to-day. But that you may thus exercise yourselves with courage and good hope, believe, hold fast the conviction, that God *is* your Saviour and Father, and will give you "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification," or, in one word, "redemption," as soon, and as completely, as you are ready to receive it.

## XXIII.

### *THE FAITHFUL SAYINGS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.*

#### VIII.—THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AN HONEST OCCUPATION.

“Faithful is the saying: If a man seek the pastorate, he desireth a good employment.”—1 TIMOTHY iii. 1.

YOU will have observed that I have dropped the word “bishop” out of the text, although it stands in our Revised as well as in our Authorized Version. I have dropped it on the best authority—that of a bishop, nay, of more than one. The Bishop of London declares the Greek word used by St. Paul to mean nothing more than “the pastoral oversight of the people.” The learned Bishop of Durham has written a charming essay to prove that, in the primitive Church, “bishop” was only another name for “presbyter.” While Dean Alford is very bold and affirms that “it is merely laying a trap” for the unlearned “to render this word, at that time of the Church’s history, ‘the office of a bishop,’ ”



since the word then meant nothing more than the function of the minister, the pastor, the overseer, the guardian of the Church: precisely, in short, what we now mean by the word *pastorate*. And with these three dignitaries all scholars, at home and abroad, virtually agree.

And yet the Greek word used here is but the feminine or abstract form of the very word (*ἐπίσκοπος*) from which our word "bishop" is derived, nay, is the very same word transferred bodily, with the usual letter changes, from the one language to the other. "Bishop" is not so much a translation of the original word, as the very word itself in an English form: and yet even bishops tell us we must not retain it here. Why?

Simply because, during the last sixteen or seventeen centuries, the word has come to carry another meaning to that with which it started. "Bishop" means for us "an overseer of *the clergy*;" while "pastor" indicates "an overseer of *the people*." But when St. Paul wrote, 'bishop' meant what "pastor" means now. There was no clergy, no learned or priestly caste, in the primitive Church: how, then, could there be any overseer of the clergy? The bishop was simply the pastor of a church, and had the care of the people committed—and, as a rule, I think—*self*-committed to his charge. He was not necessarily a teacher even, or a preacher, though he might have the gift of teaching also. Primarily, he was a man of gravity and experience, of good reputation, with a capacity for rule, who was chosen to maintain order in the Christian assembly, to

preside over its worship, to administer its discipline, to see that every gifted member of the church over which he presided exercised his gifts in an orderly way, and to be its representative and mouthpiece to the outside world. Hence he was sometimes called "presbyter," to denote his age and experience; and sometimes "bishop" to denote his function of oversight or superintendence.

Neither of these names was newly coined. "Presbyter" was taken from the Jewish Synagogue, which was governed by a council of elders, or eldersmen, such as the venerable rabbis who taught in the Schools, "the *rulers* of the synagogue" of whom we so often hear in the New Testament. While "bishop" was taken from the Greek. For some centuries before Christ came, the word *episcopos* was used in Athens to denote the leading citizens who were commissioned to regulate a new colony, or to reduce a recent conquest to order. In the Greek Version of the Old Testament, made two or three centuries B.C., it was employed to designate inspectors, superintendents, taskmasters, of every kind, civil and military, secular and ecclesiastical. And when it was adopted by the Church the title seems to have embodied no other idea than that of inspection and superintendence; though it *may* also have implied that the bearer of it, like the centurion of the Gospels, was *in* authority because he was *under* authority; since an inspector, or superintendent, if he wields a certain authority over those he is charged to look after, has also to give an account of himself to those who gave him that charge.

On all grounds, therefore, it is better to translate the word "bishop" (ἐπίσκοπος) by "pastor," and the phrase "office of a bishop" (ἐπισκοπή) by "the pastorate," in a document of the first century, since we thus avoid the misleading modern suggestions which the Greek words are sure to call up in our minds.

You will also have observed that, in the final clause of the text, I have substituted "good *employment*" for "good *work*." And for that also I have the authority of a modern bishop. But I have to confess that even this change is very far from conveying the full meaning of the Apostle, and to tell you a somewhat curious tale which hangs thereby.

In the fifth discourse of this Series I endeavoured to expound the faithful saying, "that those who have believed in God should maintain good works." This Saying you will find in Titus iii. 8. In expounding it to you I said that the two words translated "good works," simple as they are in themselves, were difficult to render into English, because they mean both "*honest occupations*" and "*honourable vocations*;" and indeed may be fairly applied to the pursuit of whatsoever is venerable, just, pure, lovely, kind. I tried to shew you how important it was (1) that the disciples of Christ should follow none but honest occupations, and (2) that by putting their best industry and skill into them, by bringing to their daily tasks a pure, generous, and devout spirit, they should raise every honest occupation they followed into an honourable, into a morally fair and beautiful, vocation. I pointed out to you that this

interpretation was borne out, at least in part, by the alternative reading given in the margin of our Revised Version, which, both at the 8th and again at the 14th verse of Titus iii., tells us that, for "maintain good works," we may read "profess *honest occupations*."

Well, St. Paul uses here the very same two words that he used there. But if you look at the margin of my text in our Revised Version, you will find no such alternative reading supplied. Our Revisers do suggest "overseer" for "bishop"; but, although there were some Nonconformists among them, they do not suggest that, for "desireth a *good work*," we should read "desireth an *honest occupation*." And thus, as it seems to me, they fail to convey, or even to suggest, the ruling sense of the passage, that which gives it its peculiar power and charm.

Did they assume that even the Christian pastorate, and much more the Church bishopric, is too dignified an office to be ranked with the ordinary vocations of Christian men? too dignified, therefore, to be spoken of as "an honest occupation"? I am afraid they did. Why, else, should they have broken their own rule, that the same words in the Original are, wherever possible, to be translated by the same English words, and to be treated in the same way? The same words are in the Greek in both places. Was it *impossible* that the same marginal note should be affixed to both?

If they thought thus to magnify their office as ministers, they could hardly have made a graver mistake. It is wholesome, no doubt, for every minister to be re-

minded that what he is called to is *a work*, not *a dignity*; and a *good* work, *i.e.* a work the end and aim of which is to do good to others, rather than to seek gain or honour for himself. But what is even this as compared with being deposed from any imaginary pride of place, any fancied superiority, any special holiness, and told, in plain blunt words, that he stands on exactly the same level with his brethren, that his work is only one of many honest occupations, and that it will depend on his capacity and devotion, his industry and skill, whether or not his honest employment be turned into an honourable vocation?

No teaching can be more wholesome than this of St. Paul's, or more welcome to any minister of a generous spirit. For no true follower of Him who became as we are in order that we might be as He is, who took our flesh and was even "made sin" for us, that He might quicken us to life and righteousness, so much as desires to stand, or to be regarded as standing, above the people whom he serves, or deems his daily work more honest, or more honourable, than theirs. Any pastor who scruples to call his work an honest occupation, or to confess that it can bring no honour to him save as he closely dedicates himself to its duties, save as he delights in them and throws himself into them, lacks the mind that was in Christ; who, when He was in the form of God, did not clutch at his equality with God, but emptied Himself, made Himself of no reputation, and humbled Himself to manhood, to death, to the cross. The more lofty and fantastic the claims he advances for himself,

or for his office, the less has he of the mind of his Master. Hands may have been laid upon him ; successors of the Apostles, more or less remote, may have ordained him : a foolish crowd may "adore" him, and hang on his lips. But all this avails him nothing. It is to *a work* that he has been called ; and by his work he will be judged. The more profuse and lofty his claims, the sorrier is the figure he presents if his toil and power do not correspond with his claims.

Is he an honest man, doing his work honestly, teaching what he really believes, giving himself to reading and thought and prayer that he may bring forth the heavenly treasure from the earthen vessels of the Word ; doing the best and most he can for those who hear him ; aiming at their growth in knowledge and goodness, not seeking his own ends or pampering his own conceit : has he taught us more of the will of God than we knew, has he touched our hearts and helped us to a better life ?—these and the like are the only questions worth asking about a Christian minister. And if we can answer them thankfully in the affirmative, we shall cheerfully admit that *his* pastorate at least has been an honest occupation, and that, by the sincerity of his devotion to it, he has even raised it into a beautiful vocation.

But is not a pastor, or minister, "called" to his work ? Yes ; and so is a shoemaker, so is a farmer, so is every artizan, every tradesman ; so are the members of every learned profession : and called in precisely the same sense. Every man is called of God, by his capacities, his opportunities, his training, or even his necessities,

to the special work his hand findeth to do. Nor is there any honest employment which may not be turned into an honourable vocation, however mean it may be in itself, if only we take an honourable spirit to it—a vocation as honourable as that of a minister or clergyman. Indeed many a man who fills a humble post in a generous and devout spirit is far more worthy of honour than the pastor, or even the bishop, who neglects his work, or who carries to it a calculating, time-serving, and mercenary spirit.

“Still,” it may be asked, “is not the clerical profession,” or, as I should prefer to say, “the Christian ministry, more honourable in itself than many other honest vocations? ought we not to choose this rather if the opportunity be offered us?”

But, surely, that depends on whether you have the special capacities and the kind of industry requisite for a faithful discharge of its duties. If you can be content with plain living and high thinking, if you have a faculty for public speech and a gift for acquiring languages; if, above all, you love and brood over God’s Word, and *will*, if you can, get to know what it means; if you really believe the spiritual culture of men the highest task allotted them and would love to help them in it; if you long to save them from the sins by which they are weakened and defiled, and to lead them into the ways of righteousness and peace; then you have a true call to the work, a true pastoral vocation, and may be happier and more useful in it than any other: you have a call which you can only neglect, a vocation which you

can only decline, at your peril. But if you have not these gifts, or have not the opportunity of cultivating them, and so cannot be a *good* minister of Jesus Christ, any other vocation will be a more honest, and even a more honourable, one for you. "Act *well* thy part : " 'tis there the true honour lies, whatever your part may be.

And even if a man have these special gifts and the opportunity of cultivating them, if he both seek and find the pastorate, he will do well, I think, not to claim too much honour whether for himself or for his vocation. The Christian minister *has* a noble work, a high calling. But when you find ministers and clergymen "magnifying their office," not by a singular devotion to its duties, but by uttering great swelling words about it and exalting it above all others, do not be carried away by their words, nor yield to their claim without reflection. Although I have been a minister for close upon forty years, and have been far happier in it than I could have been in any other calling, I have never been able to join in the excessive laudations often pronounced on it ; nor am I even yet prepared to pronounce it the highest calling open to man : nor, on reflection, will you, I think. Judged by the severest standard, the Christian statesman, who gives a higher form or a better tone to the life of a nation, is, I judge, more useful, and therefore more honourable, than many a bishop. And is not a Christian poet, like Tennyson, a more penetrating and enduring teacher of truth than most occupants of the pulpit ? Does not a Christian man of science, like Sir Isaac Newton, do more to



enlarge and elevate the thoughts of men than many a divine? For myself I should be very slow even to affirm that a Christian minister is necessarily either a better or a more honourable servant of Christ than a Christian physician, or a Christian solicitor, who puts his conscience into his daily work, or a Christian publisher and bookseller, like Daniel Macmillan, who sets himself to further the sale of the best books, and to get the best thoughts of the best men diffused and considered. I doubt whether some pictures have not preached more eloquently than any sermon, out of the New Testament. And I am pretty sure that, practically, you all agree with me, even if you differ theoretically. At all events the point is soon and easily put to the test. If God or man were to bid you select the twenty best men in this town, the most useful, the most honourable, those who are doing the most to give a right bias and tone to our general life, would *all* the names you handed in necessarily be those of ministers or clergymen? I doubt it. And if they would not, what would your selection be but an acknowledgment that other men may stand as high in the service of Christ as pastors, and that other callings may be as honourable as theirs?

*I*, my brethren, am something more than content to be placed on your level, as, indeed, I trust I have never in any way assumed to stand above it. I am delighted to be told, on such good authority, that my calling is an honest one, and that it can only be raised to an honourable vocation by my diligence, by my devotion to its duties. For this assertion of St. Paul's is very valuable

to me, as it is also to you, both polemically and practically.

Polemically, it cuts both ways—against those who make too little of “the man in the pulpit,” and against those who make too much. There are many working-men, for example, who are so prejudiced that, though they daily see what good work the clergy are doing out of the pulpit every day—among the poor, the sick, the untaught,—will hardly admit, will sometimes bluntly refuse to admit, the pastorate to be an honest occupation at all, much less an honourable employment. But were any such working-man to come to me while I had St. Paul’s teaching in my mind, and to accuse me of the white-handed indolence which never did a stroke of honest work, I could not only shew him a record which would prove that for the last forty years I had worked harder than he, and often for more hours a day, and for no larger wage than he might have earned in the same time if he would : I could also reply, “Think what you will of me and my fellows, but this is what we are commanded to be by one who was himself a common working-man, as well as a very uncommon Apostle, and *this* is all we claim to be—men filling one of many honest occupations, which we can only hope to make an honourable vocation as we work at it with our best industry and skill. This is the ideal of our office, whatever our practice may be : and have you anything to allege against it ?”

On the other hand, if there should come to me any slender young ecclesiastic, whose airs of austerity suit

but ill with his "shining morning face," and should tell me, as he *has* told me before now, that unless I receive the sacraments of the Church from him, or such as he, he can only sorrowfully hand me over to "the uncovenanted mercies of God,"<sup>1</sup> I can smilingly reply: "My dear Sir, read St. Paul; read St. Paul, and you will learn, not from a successor of the Apostles, but from an Apostle himself, that, instead of being a priest wielding the awful authority of Heaven, you are simply a man like myself; that your occupation, like mine, may be a very honest one, but that you can only win honour in it by your industry, your devotion to your daily task. Read St. Paul, and you will learn from him, as the most learned of your own living bishops has learned,<sup>2</sup> that the Christian ideal of human life is 'a holy season extending the whole year round—a temple confined only by the limits of the habitable world—a priesthood co-extensive with the human race': and that, because every time and place and man are alike holy, it has 'no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, no sacrificial tribe,' no priestly caste 'by whose intercession God is reconciled and man forgiven.'"

<sup>1</sup> I use this phrase simply because it has been hurled at me in an excommunicatory tone, by two or three of those extraordinary young clergymen who, having little else to stand upon, take their stand upon their "orders"; and not because I desire for myself anything better than the *uncovenanted* mercies of God. For God enters into covenant with men for their sake, and not for his own; not because He will not shew mercy unless He has pledged Himself to shew mercy, but because He would fain persuade men of a Mercy in which they find it hard to believe.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lightfoot's Commentary on *Philippians*, pp. 179, 181.

Valuable polemically, this Faithful Saying is, practically, still more valuable to both pastors and people. That which gave vogue and acceptance in the Primitive Church to the words, "If a man seek the pastorate, he craves an honest occupation," or an occupation morally honourable and beautiful, was the fact that in that early time, surrounded by an hostile world, the pastors of the Christian congregations filled an arduous and perilous position. The post of danger is the post of honour. And they were exposed to danger of many kinds. The first to suffer, when all suffered, for the Faith, they had to risk, and commonly to endure, the loss of all things dear to the natural heart.

But what renders the Saying specially valuable to us, in these tranquil times, is that, though the post still has perils and honours of its own, the pastoral office is here declared to be only one of many honest vocations in which Christian men may win honour. The implication of the Saying is, that you who are not pastors may make your lives as fair, as useful, as noble, as if you *had* been set apart to the Christian ministry. And that is a very catholic and a very stimulating implication. It makes us all one; it places us all on the same level of privilege; it calls us all to the same supreme task—the task of bringing mind and heart and conduct into harmony with the Divine Will, with that Pattern of all excellence disclosed to us in the person and life of Jesus Christ. It teaches us that *he* serves God and the Church best whose life is best, whose life, therefore, bears the highest testimony to the redeeming and renewing grace of God. There is no

vocation higher than that of a genuinely Christian life ; none *so* high : and this high calling is open to us all without distinction.

It puts one claim into all our lips : " Respect us if we are honestly doing a good work ; honour us if we bring to it an honourable, generous, and devoted spirit." Its one injunction to us all is : " Make your lives useful, and you will make them fair. Whatever your daily vocation may be, serve God in it, speak for God by the pure, kindly, devout temper you carry to it, and you will thus transform it into the highest vocation of all." The pastoral calling is honourable only as it helps you to live that life ; and *your* calling will become honourable in proportion as, by living that life, you help others to live it also.

And how much help of that high kind you may give, it is impossible to compute. Those can only faintly guess at it who have been strengthened against temptation, or for duty, by the pure and tender examples of goodness which they have met. But that you *may* do much good, and even bring many to life eternal, you can hardly doubt if you remember what others have done for you. For, here again, ministers often get more credit than they deserve, or claim. Their words bring many to *avow* their faith in Christ who would never have had that faith to avow but for the gracious influence of parents, or friends of the home circle, who have never entered a pulpit. At least half the young people who have told me why they wished to join the Church have confessed that they should not have been

brought to that decision but for the power of some fine example of Christian living which they had daily had before their eyes, and which spoke more persuasively than any words.

I am not insensible of, I would not for the world undervalue, the honour and pleasure of the pastor's share in that good work. But is he therefore to forget or to undervalue the still greater share which others have had in it? No, verily. Enough for him that he has done his part faithfully. It should be a new, an added, joy to him to find that others are doing as good a work as he, and are so ordering their lives as to make them not holy and comely alone, but a quickening inspiration and power.

Let the conclusion of the whole matter be, then, that we all return to our several vocations, knowing that each one of them may be made a holy calling, and even an honourable calling; and resolved that, God helping us, we will pursue it in a spirit so upright, so diligent, so devout, that we may all be faithful ministers of our common Master and Lord.

## XXIV.

### *THE IMPOTENT WOMAN.*

“And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath day. And behold, a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years ; and she was bent together, and could in no wise unbend herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her ; and immediately she was made straight and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue, being moved with indignation because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, answered and said to the multitude, There are six days in which men ought to work ; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath. But the Lord answered him and said, Ye hypocrites, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering ? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath ? And as he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame ; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.”—LUKE xiii. 10-17.

THAT is a very familiar, yet very pathetic, story. It is one of those “simple annals of the poor” which at once lay hold on the popular heart. And, no doubt, the figure of that poor impotent woman, labouring wearily and painfully through the crowded streets to the syna-

gogue, and there crouching in her accustomed seat, her wan, drawn face bent downward to the ground, has often engaged our thoughts and touched our hearts. None the less, however, we may have missed the significance and pathos of some of the phrases in which her story is couched. Some of these are singularly suggestive ; and as we meditate on them, they disclose one characteristic touch after another, until we gain a tolerably complete conception of the woman whom Jesus loosed from the chain which had so long bound and crippled her.

Thus, for instance, the opening phrase of the narrative is significant of much. She is described, and described by a learned physician who was apt to weigh his words, as "a woman who had *a spirit of infirmity*;" not simply an infirmity, but *a spirit* of infirmity. Now that does not mean that she was of a weak, or infirm, spirit ; for, as we shall see, she was of a most brave and patient temper,—and patience implies even greater strength than courage. The phrase denotes, rather, that her disease had no merely physical origin ; that it was one of those subtle and mysterious derangements of the nervous system before which Medical Science still stands helpless and abashed : that it was one of those inward inexplicable maladies whose origin was psychical (mental) rather than physical ; which, because it took its rise in the spirit, and not in the flesh, the medical science of Antiquity attributed to the influence of an alien spirit of more than mortal power. Even St. Paul, you will remember, held the crippling infirmity, or the



mortal agony, which he could only compare to "a stake in his flesh," to be "*a messenger of Satan*, sent to buffet" him ;—as, in some sense, no doubt it was.

Of all maladies these are the hardest to bear. They sap the very foundations of health. They rob us of the very strength which would help us to endure them. They smite and derange the nervous centres which are the very seat of life, and which lie nearest to the mental powers, which seem indeed to be the immediate links of connection between the body and the soul. To bear these bravely is to be brave indeed. And we have one or two hints that this poor impotent woman did bear her burden bravely, albeit it was so heavy that, under its pressure, she was so "bent together" that "she could in no wise unbend herself."

"She could *in no wise* unbend," or straighten, herself. Then she had *tried*, tried in many ways, although all had failed. She was no passive fretful invalid—so the phrase seems to imply—giving place to her infirmity weakly and without a struggle. Her bondage was not a willing bondage. She was not of those who brood over and magnify the symptoms of disease, making no effort to shake it off, but, rather, priding themselves on the variety and uniqueness of the sufferings they parade. She had taxed her natural energy to resist the encroachments of her disorder : she had employed the resources of Art to check and alleviate them : she had refused to give up any activity of mind or body of which she was yet capable.

For, observe, that, though crippled and emaciated by

her long agony, with as handsome an excuse for keeping home and bed as heart of woman could desire, she habitually went to the synagogue on the sabbath. *Habitually*; for on the day we meet her there, she had no special motive for going. She had not come to look for Jesus the Healer, and to ask his help. "Jesus *saw her*, and called her to him." She was there simply because it was her custom to go; because the worship was a solace to her troubled heart; because this effort to reach the Synagogue and share its teaching and worship was one of the forms in which she fought against the advances of her malady. From many of the activities and pleasures of life, from many modes of serving God and her neighbour, she was quite shut out by her infirmity. But what she could do, she did. And, verily, she had her reward. She met One who *could* lift her up. In the Synagogue, on the sabbath, "she was made straight, and glorified God."

Another significant touch is our Lord's recognition of "this woman" as "*a daughter of Abraham.*" He does not mean simply that she was a Jewess. To most of the Jews He denied the title of sons and daughters of Abraham, on the ground that they did not share the faith of "the father of the faithful." But her claim He admits. It is He Himself who confers the title upon her. And, hence, we may fairly conclude that she was one of the faithful few who waited for the Consolation of Israel, and who, while they waited, were walking in all the ordinances and commandments blameless. Hence Christ calls her to Him—does not leave her to

seek Him out and to sue for his grace : does not, as He did with so many, hold her off for a while with words which seemed to repel, but were really intended to quicken faith and stimulate desire. In her, faith and the desire for spiritual good were both present and strong. And, therefore, He calls this true daughter of Abraham to Him, lays healing hands upon her, and bestows an unsought benediction.

There is still one other phrase which we need to note and emphasize. No sooner had the healing word been spoken, the healing work done, than the ruler of the synagogue, filled with indignation, but not daring to vent it on Christ, turns to the people, and rebukes them for coming to be healed on the sabbath. In his answer to the indignant ruler—a genuine specimen of the Pharisees and therefore addressed as their representative—Christ pleads the claim of this daughter of Abraham, “whom Satan hath bound, *lo, these eighteen years!*”

Now in reading the Gospels we often have to observe how perfectly Jesus knew what was in man and needed not that any should testify unto Him: how, for example, He saw in Simon Bar-jona the hidden Kephas, in “the son of the timid gentle dove” the stedfast “rock” on which He would build his Church; how He looked on Nathanael, and saw, beneath the outward appearance, the inward man of the heart, an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile, though in his father Jacob there had been so much; how He looked on Iscariot, and forthwith knew who it was that should betray Him: how, in short, He read men’s histories in their faces,

and in their past histories hints and omens of their future. And here also we may find a trace of this divine insight, or this gift of divination. He looks on the impotent woman, and knows that, for eighteen years, she has brooked a cruel bondage to weakness and pain. The scene suggested by the ejaculation which breaks his rebuke of the austere and hidebound ruler is this: Christ turns to the angry Pharisee and argues that love is the fulfilling of the law, that to do a kindness is to keep the sabbath. "Even on the sabbath," He argues, "you lead away your ox or ass to the water-troughs; and you do well in thus satisfying their needs. But ought not this woman, whose need is so much greater,—ought not this daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound"—and here He pauses, turns to the woman, peruses her worn patient face, reads on it the traces of an eighteen years' conflict with the spirit of infirmity; and pointing to her bent face and form as to a book in which much strange matter might be read, He resumes—"whom Satan has bound, lo"—behold! look there and you will see the imprints of the weary years—"these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?"

It is very wonderful to think, my brethren, of the stories those Divine Eyes must have read on the countenances on which they fell; stories of hidden vice and secret sin, as when he looked on the accusing Pharisees and bade him that was without sin fling the first stone: stories, too, of hidden self-denial and secret acts of patient faith and love, as when he looked on the poor

widow who out of her penury cast all that she had into the Temple chest. And it is not less wonderful to think of the stories these Eyes, which still go to and fro through all the earth, must read on your faces and mine—the secret sins, the hidden vices ; the hidden charities, too, let us hope, and the secret agonies of our struggle with evil. The comfort, the great comfort, for us and for all is, that the Eyes, which are keen and searching as a flame of fire, are also full of tenderness and grace. In the face of the impotent woman the Master saw the signs, not only of an infirmity of eighteen years, but also of an eighteen years' conflict with her infirmity. He knew that, against her will and despite her struggles, she had been tied and bound as the ox or the ass is chained to its stall, with no merciful hand to loose the chain, and to lead her away to the healing waters. And as He looked on her and read her pitiful story, his heart was smitten with an infinite ruth, so that He could no longer contain Himself, but called her to Him and, with one gracious word, snapped the chain which had galled her so long, and set her free. Nor will He, we may be very sure, be less equitable or less merciful in his reading, his interpretation, of the stories which Time has written on *our* faces or graven on our hearts. He will remember our infirmities, and the force of our temptations, and make large allowance for them all. He will pass by no line which speaks of conflict, even though it do not also speak of victory ; and, in his grace, He will put a value on all our poor struggles and endeavours which will fill us with grateful wonder and surprise.

1. Now this impotent Woman may fairly be taken as a type of character to which all, or many of us, answer, and answer much more closely than, for example, to that of the Prodigal Son : for, if we have inherited a soul, naturally Christian, or have had a pious nurture and training, or if under the mask of our insensibility or our indifference to Religion, the grace of God has wrought on our hearts in secret and inscrutable ways, we probably have not broken into open rebellion or flagrant vice, and wasted our patrimony in riotous living. We much more nearly resemble this faithful daughter of faithful Abraham. For her misfortune was not that she was a contented slave, in willing submission to an evil power ; but that she was held in a grievous bondage, insomuch that, try how she would, she could in no wise lift herself up into straightness and health. And we may not be, most of us probably are not, of those who rejoice in iniquity, or of those who have resigned themselves to a bondage they never hope to escape. We may not be very strong against temptation, indeed ; nor do we profess to be very wise or very good. But we love truth, we honour goodness, we try to do our duty. And yet, despite all our efforts after truth and goodness, there is "a spirit of infirmity" in us, an incompetency to do the good we would, a subtle mysterious malady whose origin is in the will, a malady inscrutable to human eyes, immedicable by human art.

In different men it takes different forms, discloses itself in different symptoms. My infirmity shews itself in one way, yours in another : mine succumbs to one

class of temptations, yours to another class. But we have each "his own lust," his cleaving and besetting sin, his private and peculiar inability to abstain from evil and to do well. And whatever form this infirmity assumes, we are sorrowfully aware that it has one common feature in us all ; it bows us downward ; it bends us together, so that we cannot in any wise lift up ourselves to the straightness, the rightness, to which we aspire. It sets our affections on earthly things when we would fain fix them on heavenly things. It obtrudes worldly and selfish cares and aims on our most devotional hours, and mars with its sceptical suggestions the peace we should enjoy in our Father's presence, the trust we should repose in our Father's care. It lowers our highest resolves, and frustrates our best purposes and desires. We can never be sure of ourselves for it—never be sure that we shall be true to our most intimate convictions, to the aims we most fondly cherish.

This bondage is, indeed, the constant theme of our confessions and prayers. To the new better life in us it is natural to look and grow upward ; it is only by the remaining power of our old evil life that this upward tendency of the soul is thwarted and reversed. And often we hate our chain. We long and pray to be loosed from it. We groan, being burdened. We are in heaviness through manifold temptations. We loathe the infirmity to which nevertheless we yield. We try to shake off the yoke, to stand erect, to do the good we would, to become what we fain would be. But we cannot in any wise lift up ourselves ; and, after many futile

endeavours, we acknowledge that, though the will to do good is present, the power to perform we find not.

There is but One who can make us straight. The Healer of the impotent woman can heal us. We must go to Him, we must get Him to say, and to say again and again, as often as we need to hear it, "Thou art loosed from thine infirmity." And He *will* say it—for what else is He our Saviour? will repeat it, if we ask Him, and listen for his voice, and use the grace which He imparts, striving by the aid of his Spirit against the spirit of our infirmity. Let this, then, be the first lesson we learn from our Narrative, that only Christ, only the strong Son of God, can redeem us from the weakness which mars our service; but that He will do it, if we let Him.

2. We may also learn why He often delays his help. The impotent Woman was left in her bondage for eighteen weary sorrowful years. A true daughter of faithful Abraham, we may be sure that she often added prayer to her endeavours to unbend herself, to lift herself up. And this blending of supplication with endeavour is the very kind of prayer which God most delights to answer. Yet no answering voice is heard; no eye pities, no arm saves. She is left in the accumulating miseries of her conflict and her captivity while the tardy days of all these years drag their slow length along. Think of it! Think of it, and confess how much sooner your faith would have failed, your patience have given out. But *she* does not distrust God, nor cease to come before Him. All her appointed time she waits,



and worships while she waits. And not in vain. We cannot tell what secret stores of strength and good were vouchsafed her, what discipline of perfection, as the years slowly passed away. Possibly she had not borne her burden patiently at first. Perhaps it was only as the years went by, and through the discipline and teaching they brought, that she rose to the faith and earned the style and title of "a daughter of Abraham." But, however that may have been, it was well that she waited. Little as we know of her, we can *see* that it was well she had to wait so long. For, now, she finds deliverance not only from the bonds of the flesh, but also from the bonds of the law : she finds not healing only, but salvation. In her physician she beholds the Messiah. Loosed from her infirmity, she is also made free of the kingdom of heaven. She has seen the Lord's Christ, and can either live or die in peace.

And it is often thus with us. God often delays to grant us the help we ask, and need, that He may develop faith in us by trial, that He may let patience have her perfect work, that out of weakness we may be made strong by conflict and prayer and endeavour : and, last and best of all, that, when we are thus prepared for his coming, He may bring us a good beyond our hopes, and bestow on us a blessing greater than we could once ask or receive. Let experience speak. Talk with any of the good who have been long and sorely tried ; and with one voice they will confess that, had deliverance come earlier than it did, they might have missed its most precious fruit. And let their experience assure

you that, if you also trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, He will give you the desire of your heart.

3. Finally, we may learn, when we are exercised by these kind delays, where and when to look for the Divine appearing. We shall find Christ, as the impotent woman found Him, in the synagogue, on the sabbath ; or, to translate the phrase into modern terms of speech, we shall find Him amid the sanctities of worship, when the soul has learned to rest in Him. From of old the Psalmist has taught us that God's way, mysterious and untraceable on the sea on which we go to and fro for traffic and pleasure, grows clear and plain to us in the Sanctuary. The Lord reveals Himself to us on the Lord's day, in the Lord's house, that we may know that He is with us throughout the week, and carry the sense of his friendly Presence wherever we go.

Again I say, Let experience teach you. Speak with those who have most deeply tasted of his goodness, who know most of his power and compassion, and they will tell you that they have never been so near to Him, never won so clear an insight into his ways, never risen into so intimate a communion with his Spirit, never so heartily consented to his will, as when they have joined in his worship, and, upborne on the wings of a common sympathy, have come before Him in congregation with their fellows. They will tell you that they have never found the light that is in them burn so low, never been in such danger of slipping into a habit of indifference to the eternal realities which are the very salt of life, never been so oppressed by the spirit of their infirmity,

as when they have abstained from public worship, and their foot has forgotten the way to the house of God. And does not your own experience confirm theirs? Have you not found that you are never so alive to the claims of truth and duty, charity and righteousness, as when, in the Sanctuary, you have taken part in the worship of those who, at least for the time, were of one heart and one mind with yourselves? Have you not discovered that you are never so indifferent to them, never in such danger of contracting a habit of indifference, as when week after week has passed and you have had no thoughts but your own to occupy your mind, no prayers but those which you framed for yourselves and offered by yourselves? If you would find Christ, then, and be saved from your infirmities, if you would penetrate the mystery of human life, and receive strength to endure its perplexities and sorrows and cares, seek Him in his House, among those whose hearts are tried as yours are tried, whose sympathy will lighten your griefs, whose supplications will lend new force to your prayers, whose thanksgivings will swell the volume of your praise.

The whole meaning, function, value of the Christian Sabbath and worship may indeed be inferred from this simple story. All that they do for us may be summed up in this: they *lift us up*, they loosen us from our infirmity, they constrain us to glorify God. Weary of the burden of our care, fretting at the chain which binds us to the weak halting flesh, ashamed of the low and petty rate at which we live, we come here hoping, expecting, to meet our Father, our Friend, our Saviour.

For a little space we are at rest. We cast our load of care on Him. He breaks our chain. Our cold and thankless hearts are touched with new emotions of penitence and trust, love and charity, hope and gratitude.

He is found of them that seek Him. Nay, more, He is found even of those that seek Him not. This poor Woman did not expect to find, yet she found Christ. She had come to the Synagogue simply because it was her habit to come. No music of prophetic hope impelled her feet; and yet she is made straight and strong. And we may come, blinded with sorrow, or oppressed with care, or trembling with apprehension, not looking for the Divine Healer; we may come only because it is our habit to come, with hearts all bowed together, feeling bitterly that we cannot in any wise lift up ourselves, and are unworthy of any help or consolation from Heaven; and yet, coming even thus, we may be found of Christ, and healed and comforted by his gracious words.

Has not this been our frequent experience? The promise is that, if we look for Him, we shall find Him; that if we seek Him in spirit and in truth, his true and mighty Spirit shall be given us. But has He not again and again been better to us than his word? Have we not come here with hearts that were dull, mute, void of hope, looking for no vision, expecting no assistance or relief, and nevertheless received a grace from Him which has drawn us to worship, constrained us to seek for truth and comfort, warmth of heart and activity of spirit, for faith to trust Him, for patience to endure? Ah,

yes ; again and again, beyond our thought and well-nigh against our will, He has thus met with us, taken us to his heart, and spoken comfortably unto us. Shall we not then glorify Him for all the glorious things which He has done for us, and cherish the hope that, in every time of our tribulation, He will succour and save us ?

## XXV.

### *LOVE AND LOVE'S REWARD.*

#### AN EASTER SERMON.

“And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe ; and they were amazed. And he saith unto them, Be not amazed ; ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified ; he is risen ; he is not here ; behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.”—MARK xvi. 5-7.

THESE Verses record an incident which occurred at this spring season of the year, and suggest thoughts appropriate to the time. Whatever doubts may obscure other chronological facts in the history of our Lord, there is no doubt that He died on the eve, or the evening, of the Passover, and rose again on the morning after the Paschal Sabbath. Nearly twenty centuries ago at sunrise, on the morning of what we now call Easter Sunday, certain women, distraught with grief, went to the Sepulchre, to find an angel in the place where Jesus had lain, and to hear from him that the Lord had risen from the dead.

It was not by chance, or accident, that Jesus died when He did, or that He rose again on the third day. All was afore appointed, ordained by Him in whose hand are all our times. The redeeming Passover of the Jews pointed through two thousand years to the season in which *our* Passover should be offered up. And even we can see a divine propriety in the selection of the time, in so far at least as we of these latitudes are concerned. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus synchronizes with the resurrection of the natural world. Just when the earth is breaking from its wintry grave, He came forth from a grave which could not hold Him. In the sepulchre, and in the garden in which it stood, the same divine process was going on,—new and more glorious life coming forth from the very bosom of earth; the natural symbol and the spiritual reality casting cross lights on each other, and making each other infinitely more significant and beautiful.

The very date of the Resurrection is a theme for praise—at least for us. Go into the fields at this season of the year, at this rising springtide of life, and everything will speak to you of the resurrection from the dead. "Life is at work in every emerald bud, in the bursting bark of every swelling bough, in the greening tints of every brown" hedgerow or hill-side. A month or two since, and everything was still and cold, bound in the fetters of death, covered with its shroud of snow. But, now, life is coming back to the dead world. It cannot be holden. A mighty tide is stirring and rushing through its every vein. It is *rising*, rising from the tomb, cloth-

ing itself in its green waving robes, adorning itself with grace and beauty. And this annual miracle reminds you of the miracle once for all ; this annual resurrection of that great Resurrection on which all the hopes of faith depend. You are not permitted to forget it. Nature thrusts its symbols on you from every side. Year by year, Spring weaves its garlands round the empty tomb ; while mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, fields and all gardens, creeping things and flying fowl, repeat the old glad song, " The Lord is risen ! The Lord is risen ! " And shall not we who rose in Him, we who are to rise again at his coming, shall not we take our part in this song of gladness, this song of deliverance ?

It may help us to sing and give praise if we look for awhile, not at the fact of the Resurrection itself, but at its bearing and effects on the Women to whom it was first made known. It may be that if we follow Love in its pilgrimage to the Sepulchre in the Garden, and mark the benediction it brought away with it, *we* may be stimulated to a more willing service, and receive the benediction reserved for those who love.

I. Let us consider the *love* of these Holy Women, and learn its lessons. *They* put to shame the men who, not many hours before, had professed themselves willing to die rather than desert the Son of Man. The Apostles, even Peter and John, still hang back, in doubt or despair. But the Maries and Salome, very early in the morning, with none to help them, not witting how the stone is to be rolled away, come to the Sepulchre. So soon as



the Sabbath law will permit, and before they can well see to discharge the offices of love, they hasten to the spot, where the body of Jesus had been laid. Why are *they* the first to do Him service?

(1) *The last at the Cross are the first at the Sepulchre.*—That explains it all. They had seen how Christ loved them, how far his love for them would carry Him. And now they shew their love for Him who had proved his love for them to be stronger than death. It is at the Cross that we learn and catch the love of Christ. It is from his death that we draw motive, impulse, strength, for his service. If we turn away from that, or stand afar off, we shall not be the first to behold his glory; we shall not be foremost in serving Him.

(2) Another lesson we may learn from them is, that *love is greater than faith.* Christ had said, "The Son of man must be crucified, and he shall rise again the third day;" said it many times: said it in tones so grave and sorrowful, and again in tones of such deep and yearning desire, that his disciples were startled and amazed. No word of his seems to have struck them more. One would have thought they could never have forgotten it, least of all when they saw it in part fulfilled. But they did forget it—the women as well as the men. The Crucifixion says nothing to them of the Resurrection, though both had been foretold in one breath. They come through the morning brightness without any light of hope. *The spices they bear with them testify against them.* They have come to embalm a dead Friend, not to greet a living Saviour and Lord. Even the open sepulchre, and the

vacant resting-place, quicken no memory of the prophetic word. The angel has to remind them of what Jesus had said while He was yet with them. Nay, even that does not suffice. After the angel has spoken, Mary Magdalene goes wandering about the garden, stunned, stupefied, with grief; still seeking for the absent body, till she sees One advancing to her whom she mistakes for the gardener, and asks, "Where have they laid him?"—holding fast her preconception, notwithstanding the angelic assurance "He is risen"! pursuing her fixed idea, unable to admit any other, and so trembling on the very verge of insanity. It is not till Jesus turns and calls her by name, that she can credit the wonder and believe that the Lord is risen indeed.

"When Jesus was risen, he appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene." Can you not see why? Mary most *needed* to see Him. A few hours more of that frantic search, that possession by one fixed thought, which made her unconscious of the realities around her, blind to all facts, deaf to all words, that did not confirm her thought and deepen her sorrow, and reason would have trembled from its throne. Jesus appeared first to her because her need of Him was most pressing and immediate, and not simply because she had been so great a sinner.

And of all these Holy Women it is true that their love outlived their faith. They had forgotten Christ's words. They had lost Him, and trust in Him as the Redeemer of Israel. Faith was dead, but not love. The man Christ Jesus, the wise Teacher, the gentle forgiving Friend,—He is not forgotten. They cling passionately

to the poor deserted tabernacle in which He had sojourned among them. If He were no longer their Saviour, He was still their Friend—the best Man, the wisest Teacher, the kindest Friend they had ever known. They could not and would not forget that. If they must lose faith, and give up hope, they could not cease to love.

So that Love may live even when Faith is dead. A true creed has its value. The faith which substantiates the articles of that creed, makes them true and makes them ours, is a very potent grace. But love is stronger and diviner still. It covers a multitude of sins. It atones for innumerable errors. Love is of God; nay, faith is *of* God, but love *is* God. Faith is God's gift; but love is God's self and substance. To believe is human; to love is divine. "He that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God in him." Faith is of value to us, therefore, just in proportion as it appropriates the love of God; just in proportion as it helps us to love Him with all our heart—because He loves us with all his heart, and our neighbour as ourself, because He loves our neighbour no less than us. Let us hold fast by love, then, even though we should lose hope and faith. Let us hold fast by love; for so we shall recover both faith and hope.

(3) *Love implies* unselfishness, *self-sacrifice*. These Women had followed Christ *in life*. But *then* He had taught them lessons they could learn nowhere else. They thought that this was He who should redeem Israel. They may have expected that He would confer

upon them honours and rewards. If they ministered to Him, He also ministered to them ; and they may have hoped that for all they did, and for all they forsook, they would receive a hundredfold. There may have been some taint of selfishness in *their* service, as we know there was in that of the Twelve. If there were not, it was at least open to question and suspicion.

They had followed Him *even to the Cross*. But even on the Cross He claimed to have the keys of life and death, the honours and royalties of the heavenly kingdom. It is possible that, to the last, they thought He might deliver Himself out of the hands of his enemies, come down from the Cross to ascend the throne, and to load their heart with benefits. I do not say they *had* these thoughts and hopes, albeit the Twelve seem to have had them. Possibly, like Mary of Bethany, they saw farther than the Twelve and loved Him more purely. But suspicion might have attached even to them, if they had not put their unselfishness beyond doubt.

For they loved Christ, not in life alone, but also *in death*. They followed Him, not only to the Cross, but *to the tomb*. When He lay cold and helpless in the grave ; when, as they conceived, there was nothing more that He could do for them, when all hope had died away, and faith in Him as King and Saviour lay buried with Him in the sepulchre, they came to embalm his body, and to weep over their departed Friend. They braved the anger of the Jews, they braved repulse and insult from the Roman guards, that they might discharge the last offices of love. We cannot suspect them of selfishness in that.

We can only bow and wonder before an unselfishness which so far transcends our own.

In them, moreover, unselfishness rose to the height of sacrifice. They had followed the body of the Lord from the cross to the tomb. They knew the place where He was laid—knew, therefore, that Nicodemus had “brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about a hundred pounds weight.” They were, probably, among those who “took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.” All this had been done on Passover Eve. What brings them, then, on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, to the garden and the tomb? They have come to embalm Him. They have come to *repeat* what had already been done, but done hurriedly, perhaps, and in some confusion. They are not even content to use what the rich Nicodemus had provided. They must have “sweet spices” of their own. Nay, as the Evangelist, lovingly dwelling on the record of their love, has been careful to note, they have “bought” them. They have *bought* spices, although there are already enough and to spare in the sepulchre!

Do you ask, “To what purpose was this waste?” I reply that so deep and devoted a love as theirs yearns for sacrifice, *will make* sacrifices, and finds its only relief and consolation in making them. True love does not always dwell with prudence. There is a higher wisdom than the prudential one—a wisdom which upholds the sacredness of love and the beauty of self-sacrifice. It was something more, and more divine, than prudential

considerations which brought Jesus to the Cross and the tomb. And these poor Women, in their "waste," did but imitate Him to whom they ministered ; even *they* were but following Him afar off.

And our love, if it is to be worthy of its name and origin, must include unselfishness, and rise to self-sacrifice. It does not become us who follow Him, and follow with these Holy Women, to be for ever asking, "What shall we have therefor?" It does not become us to follow Him, and with them, on purely æconomical motives—because we fear the eternal burning, because we are willing to exchange the things that perish for the things which endure, because we can give up the pleasures of a season for an immortal joy. All that may be very prudent, but it is not unselfish : it is mere barter, not sacrifice. And it is ill with us, and not well, if our Religion does not lift us above the love of self, and teach us to find in self-sacrifice a deep and solemn joy. It is ill with us, and not well, if we are not prepared, like Christ, to lose our life that we may find it ; if we are not prepared, like these Holy Women, to do more than mere law demands or mere prudence prompts, if we, too, are not impelled to buy sweet spices, and give ourselves to the service of Christ's body—the Church.

(4). *Love, even the deepest and strongest, is under law to God.* If these love-impelled Women transcended human laws, they observed the Divine law. On the evening of the Crucifixion, "the women also followed after, and beheld the sephulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned and prepared spices and ointments ;

and rested the seventh day *according to the commandment.*" They rested on the seventh day ; but "*very early* in the morning of the first day of the week, they came to the sepulchre." As soon as the Hebrew sabbath was over, *but not until* it was over, they follow the promptings of their love, and come to the garden-grave.

Here is the true love, love moving within the circle of the law. They do not make their sorrow an excuse for disobedience. Because they have lost much, they do not throw up all. Christ, who was greater than the temple, is gone, but the temple still stands. Their hearts are set on a labour of love, but rest and worship are the work appointed for the sabbath. It is very hard to have lost Him—the dearest and divinest Friend they ever had. It is very hard to wait when they would fain be at work for Him, very hard to worship when their hearts are breaking with grief. But there is a law, a Sabbath law. *He* used to keep it ; so will they. And hence they wait and worship, resting "*according to the commandment.*"

And our love should not run wild, overleaping all bounds, taking no thought, acknowledging no restriction. For love is at once "the end of the commandment," and "the fulfilling of the law." The true love does not ask, How may I best gratify or display myself? but, How may I best glorify God and serve man? It finds its highest expression in keeping the commandment.

II. And it was well for these Holy Women that they did keep the commandment. Had they broken it, not resting on the sabbath, but coming to the tomb, they would have found in it only a dead body. Keeping it,

and coming after the sabbath, they found a living Lord. They had indeed a threefold reward for their love and piety.

(1) *They saw an angel in the sepulchre.* "Entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man"—whom they afterwards discovered to be an angel—"sitting on the right side"—the side of favour, marking his presence as auspicious—"clothed in a white robe"—the raiment of hope and gladness. Heaven has not only come down to earth, but to the grave, earth's lowest and most loathsome haunt. In the very home of corruption there sits a son of immortality. "A token," say the fathers of the Christian Church, "that some great revolution had been wrought; that the grave, now that Christ had passed through it, was no longer what it had been." A token, indeed! a token that Christ had dispelled the darkness of death, bringing life and immortality to light; a token that there is now a path to heaven from and through the grave; a token that when the "natural body" dissolves, it is that "a spiritual body" may come in its stead; a token that when we put off this earthly tabernacle, we put on our house from heaven; a token that we shall pass through the tomb into a heavenly fellowship and become as the angels of God. All this, with much more, seems implied in the vision and symbol here set before us—an angel sitting in a tomb.

(2) Another element in their reward was that *they found Him alive, whom to embalm for death was their highest hope.* The angel is not mute. He speaks to them: "Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified." The



angel, you observe, gives the risen One the name of his humiliation, the name which was then a byword of contempt,—“*Jesus*,” his personal human name ; . “*of Nazareth*,” whence no good thing could come. He speaks too of his ignominious death : “*Jesus, who was crucified*.” He might have used other names than these, with other implications, and they would have understood Him equally well. Why does He use these, then, unless it were to exalt their love ? For it makes much for their devotion that they should come seeking a crucified Nazarene. It was saying that neither the contempt poured upon Him in life, nor the shame and indignity of his death, could alienate them from Him. It was saying that they had loved Him in life, though He was a Nazarene ; that they loved Him in death, though He hung on a tree.

Then come the words of joy, words which they could not believe at first, but which soon became their song in the house of their pilgrimage : “He is risen. He is not here. Look, here is the place where you laid Him, vacant now and for ever. He *cannot* be here. He *must* be risen.” There is, you see, a kind of argument in the angel’s words. He points to the vacant place as though it could have become vacant in only one way. He appeals to the absence of the body as the sole and conclusive proof of the resurrection. As no doubt it was, at least to these Women, so soon as they could reason at all. For they knew that his enemies would not have removed the body of Jesus, their whole credit being involved in retaining it where it had been laid. They knew that his

friends had not stirred ; that they had given up all hope ; that they were closely shut up for fear of the Jews. So soon, therefore, as they had recovered from their affright, they would feel the full force of the appeal, and bear witness to the resurrection of the dead.

(3) Indeed, the last element in their reward was precisely this : that *they, first of all, were commissioned to preach the Resurrection*. They were sent, as apostles, to the Apostles—sent to teach those who taught the world : “ Go your way, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him.” Was there ever love like that of Christ ? These Women had lost faith in Him, but He has not lost faith in them : He makes them the ministers of his truth and grace. Even that, however, is not so wonderful, for, if they had lost faith, they had held fast love. The wonder lies, rather, in the errand on which He sent them. His disciples had failed both in faith and love. And yet the first tidings, the first greetings, are to be sent to them. Christ had no sooner triumphed over death than He thought of them, and began once more to minister unto them.

One of the Twelve had gone further even than the rest, adding apostasy and blasphemy to desertion. And Christ thinks of *him*. “ Tell my disciples, *and Peter* ”—Peter, impassioned in sorrow as in sin, who can hardly believe himself a disciple, who will not take an invitation addressed to them as including him—tell *him*, too ; give *him* a special invitation ! Was there ever love like this ?

Finally, observe that the Angelic utterance ends with

*a promise that the risen Christ will come again*: "He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." The promise was, as you know, fulfilled. He appeared to more than five hundred of the brethren at once. He also appeared to the Twelve, by the lake and on the mountain.

And the Angel has a word of promise for us. For Christ goes before *us*, as He went before the Twelve. He is our Forerunner; *for us* He has passed within the veil. He has ascended to his Father, not simply to assume the glory He had with the Father before the world was, but also to prepare a place for us, that where He is there we may be also. He will come again, to receive us unto Himself. *We* shall see Him, as He has said, and, seeing Him, be made like unto Him. Before that happy day can come, we must, indeed, pass through the sepulchre, the new sepulchre which He has hallowed for us, and in which our flesh shall rest in hope. But if we do that, if we follow Him to death, we shall also follow Him into the life everlasting.

"The Lord is risen; the Lord is risen!" We may well take up our Easter song with joyful lips; for, among other meanings, it has this: *We* shall rise, to be with Him. Amen.

## XXVI.

### *WHAT THE GOD-MAN REVEALS OF GOD AND MAN.*

"He hath declared him."—JOHN i. 18.

THERE are two modes in which we may acquaint ourselves with the facts and truths whether of the physical or of the moral world,—the theoretical and the practical. If, for example, we wish to know all that can be known of the wildflowers that grow in the district in which we live, we may get a botanical manual in which they are figured and described. We may study the plates and the letter-press diligently, till we are familiar with the name, the form, the colours, the characteristic qualities and distinctions of every plant that is to be found in the fields and woods, the bogs and streams, of our county or shire. This is one method in which we may acquire the knowledge we seek. But if we pursue the other method, we shall not be content with books and what they teach. We shall walk out into the fields and woods; we shall pick our way through the bogs and wade the streams; we shall look at and study the flowers as they

grow in their several habitats ; we shall mark their resemblances and differences ; we shall collect them, bring them home, pore over them at our leisure, get some friend to name them to us perhaps, and not be content till we have added to our store every flower that the district yields, and are able to recognize and name them wherever we light upon them. This is the practical, as distinguished from the theoretical, method of acquiring knowledge. And no man doubts which is the better method of the two. We all admit that to learn from nature is better than to learn from books. We all feel that the practical method of studying facts and principles makes our knowledge far more accurate, complete, and vital than the theoretical ; that it brings truth closer home to us, and renders it a more assured and enduring possession.

If, then, a manual of theology and a gospel be offered to us, which of the two shall we prefer ? Surely we shall prefer the gospel—truth in the deeds of a living Man to truth in the dogmatic abstractions of a book, truth in practice to truth in theory, truth in a life to truth in a creed. No doubt there must be theologies, just as there must be botanical theories or systems : both are useful in their place. But if it were of the last importance to us to acquire a rapid, complete, and familiar acquaintance with the plants of a district, we should certainly prefer walking through it with a living and accomplished guide, who could give us any help we required, to studying any book, however able and learned. And, in like manner, if we feel it to be of the last im-

portance that we should come to know God, and ourselves, and our relation to Him, and his will concerning both us and the human race at large, we shall infinitely prefer that a living Man, who knows both man and God perfectly, should take us by the hand, and shew us God, and ourselves, and how we stand related to Him,—we shall infinitely prefer this practical method to reading even the most able and edifying theological treatise. For we are sure that, with some competent guide to teach us, there will be a power, a freshness, a life in our knowledge which we could never gain from the most diligent study of books.

But is such a guide to be had? Is there One who knows both God and man, nay, who can shew us both God and man, shew us what God is and what we ought to be and may be? and will He take us by the hand and teach us what we most need to know? Yes, there is such a Guide, and to no one of us will He refuse his help. He has spoken, He still so speaks as to awaken responses from our reason, our conscience, our heart. No man, by mere intellectual research, ever has, or ever can, find God out to perfection; but the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared—literally, He has *interpreted*—Him: Christ is the *exegete*, the *expositor* of God, and of God's will.

Listen, and judge for yourselves. You want to know God, and how He stands affected toward you. You want to know yourselves, and what lies before you. Well, the Man Christ Jesus came expressly to shew us the Father. That is, He came to teach us that God is

our Father ; that whatever we see or can imagine of pure parental love holds good of Him. Now we have known parents, or we have known of parents, who would suffer anything, make any sacrifice, endure any pain for the welfare of their children ; who would correct their faults with an untiring patience : who would confront the most shameless ingratitude with a constant and forgiving love ; who would even die to save them from harm. And this, said Christ, is what *God* is, and is like. He is our Father—your Father and mine. His love is stronger than death and without a bound. Sin cannot alienate it ; hatred cannot alienate it. And here is the proof. He that hath seen *Me* hath seen the Father. And while you are yet sinners, yet enemies, I lay down my life for you. Thus God, my Father and yours, reveals and commends his love for you.

This, I repeat, is Christ's revelation concerning God—that He is our Father, and loves us, despite our enmities and sins, with a love that will not be alienated or turned aside. Does not the revelation vindicate itself to our reason, as well as touch our hearts ? Must not He who made us be better than we are, better even than we can think ? Can we see any goodness, can we so much as conceive any goodness, in his creatures which is not to be found in Him ? Can the stream of love rise beyond its source ? If not, all the sacrifices and victories of human love warrant us in believing in the love of God for us. All that parents have done and endured for the good of their children *demonstrates* in God a love at once more delicate and profound than theirs. In short,

there is not a single strain of love in the whole long story of the world which we ought not to accept as a proof that Christ's revelation of the love of God our Father is true.

But, again ; He who reveals God to us, also reveals *man*, and God's will concerning man. He calls Himself "the Son of Man"; and that, according to the Hebrew usage of speech, means that He calls Himself "*the Man*," the ideal, the perfect Man, man as God conceived and will yet make him to be. And did you ever read the story of Him who went about doing good without longing to be like Him—as pure and yet as gentle, as wise and yet as humble? Do not even those who have not entered his service, with one voice, confess Him to be at least the best and noblest of the sons of men? Can you consider Him, and compare or contrast yourself with Him, and not feel how far you fall beneath the mark of his perfection? If you could hope to become the man He was, would you not cheerfully submit to any discipline, however severe? If you could cherish the hope that *all* men will one day resemble Him; if you could be sure that they are being trained into his likeness by the changes and chances of this present world, would you not account it but a very little thing that all the miseries of time should be endured in order to lead up to a consummation so devoutly to be wished?

But this *is* Christ's revelation concerning you, concerning mankind at large. You may be, you are to become such men as He was. *That* is precisely God's intention concerning you. The world *is* to be redeemed,



humanity *is* to be transfigured,—so, at least, Christ the Interpreter of the Divine will affirms ; while in his own person He shews us what that redemption and transfiguration involve. According to Him, the end which God has set before Him, and to which his providence is conducting the story of Time is—a regenerated race dwelling in a renovated world.

Christ shews the Father, then, and how He stands affected toward us ; Christ also shews us ourselves, and the prospect that lies before us. God is his Father and ours ; and we are to be such sons of God as we reverence and admire in the Son of Man. And these revelations, as we have seen, accord with reason, though reason could never have discovered them ; for God must be better than his creatures, and must will the good of his creatures : He must be more tender than any father whom He has made, and must desire that we should be his true, righteous, and loving children, wearing his image, breathing his spirit.

But what most of all gives these revelations power over us, more even than their very reasonableness, is the fact that Christ Jesus does not make them in words only, or in books, but in Himself, in his own person, character, life. He does not simply *tell* us that God is a Father who loves us ; but in his own person He shews us that Divine Love bearing our infirmities, enduring stripes for our healing, and dying to take away our sins and to give us life, even when it is we ourselves who put Him to death. He does not simply *tell* us what we ought to be, how meek, how gentle, how forgiving, how

just and truthful and kind ; but He Himself *is* all, and more than all, that He describes. He shews us the ideal, the perfect, man in his own character and conduct. *God* is in Him, and *man* is in Him ; and in Him God and man are reconciled and dwell together in an unbroken unity. Christ, therefore, is not simply one who speaks of life, or one who teaches us how to live. He *is* our life—the Life indeed ; for it is only as we become one with Him, who is one with God, that we truly live at all.

If, therefore, you would study Religion practically, not theoretically, if you would receive a gospel instead of a theology, you must come to Christ, the incarnation and the interpreter of God. He will teach you what God is and what man ought to be, not by definitions, not in abstract terms, but by shewing you the Father in Himself, and by shewing you in Himself the ideal and perfect man. He will so movingly shew you the love of God as that you will respond to it, and so brightly shew you the glory of man that you will burn to attain it. In Him you may see all the glory of God shining through all the virtues of manhood, and so see it as that you shall become perfect men in Him, and be made partakers of his Divine nature.

II. But here perhaps some thoughtful hearer may say: (and I am not conjuring up an *imaginary* objection) “That is a Gospel I would very gladly receive. Nay, I do receive it in part. ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty.’ I am sure that his love for man must be more deep and pure than that of earthly parents for

their children, that it will outdo all that is most tender and heroic in the exploits of human affection. And, therefore, I believe in the redemption of the world. I *must* believe that the goodness of our Father in heaven will conquer the evil that is in his erring children, and that, as you say, in the end a regenerated race will dwell in a renovated world. But when you speak of the Man Christ Jesus as not simply teaching us how good God is, but as shewing us the Father *in Himself*, you make Him God as well as man; and thus you throw a difficulty in my path: for I never could understand how He who very certainly was a man, and the best of men, could also be God. Can you help me out of that difficulty?"

To any such inquirer I reply: Since you sincerely believe in God the Father Almighty, I think I can shew you reason for believing that the Son of Man was also Son of God, and that He speaks to you with nothing less than a Divine authority. For you admit that God is the Source and Fountain of all goodness. You admit that there can be no goodness of any kind which does not come from Him, which is not therefore to be found in Him. But is there not a goodness in trust as well as in being trustworthy? Is there not a goodness in receiving as well as in giving? Is there not a goodness in obeying rightly as well as in ruling rightly? In short, is there not a passive and dependent form of goodness, as well as an active and bountiful goodness? But we have agreed that all goodness, goodness of every kind, is *from* God and *in* God. Must not, then, the goodness of

obedience, of submission, of humble dependence, of unfaltering trust, be in Him? Does not our very reason suggest, therefore, that there must be, so to speak, "two hemispheres in the Divine Nature, upper and under, active and passive, giving and receiving — in a word, Father and Son?" Reason itself seems to demand that, since every form of goodness has its origin in God, there should be in the Divine Nature a Son to obey as well as a Father to command, a Son to receive as well as a Father to give, a Son to sacrifice as well as a Father to accept and bless the sacrifice?

And, observe, in admitting this two-foldness in the Divine Nature, we do not deny its unity. For unity is not singleness; it rather implies manifoldness. For union there must be more than one. Unity implies, indeed, many lines running up into one centre, many threads woven into one pattern, many figures harmonized into a single composition, many notes concurring in a single concord, many members articulated into one body, many elements blended in one nature, many persons drawn into one society and informed by one and the selfsame spirit. So that our most reasonable idea of God is this—that He is as a centre in which all forms of goodness meet and blend, the recipient as well as the active, trust as well as bounty, obedience as well as authority. We most intelligently conceive the very *unity* of God when we hold his *trinity*, when we think of the Divine Nature as including the Father and the Son, united by one Spirit, and therefore as dwelling together in one eternal harmony of love.

This much we say for the thoughtful and perplexed inquirer, whose reception of the Gospel of Christ is hindered by *speculative* difficulties, who finds it hard to see the Son of God in the Son of Man. But now let us listen to a man of a more practical turn who, like his predecessor is no mere creature of the imagination, but sits among us clothed in flesh. This man says: "For my part I see God in the man Christ Jesus as I see Him nowhere else; and as I consider what *He* did and said, I am sure that God is my Father and the Father of all men. In Him, too, I see what man ought to be; and I should be only too glad to believe that I and all my neighbours are to become such men as He was. But I *cannot* believe it. I myself am not in the least like Him: and I doubt whether your bright picture of a regenerate race dwelling in a renovated world will ever prove to be more than the dream it seems to-day. Much, therefore, as I should like to believe that Christ came to quicken in all men a life like his own, I cannot believe it. The facts are against it, and facts are stubborn things."

To this practical objector, I reply: Facts *are* stubborn things; but are all the facts on your side? That they are not all on mine, I confess; for "the end" is not yet, and till "the end crowns the work" we cannot expect to find all the facts bearing witness to it. But are there not some facts, and those of prime importance, which even now already testify that Christ is in very deed the true life of men, and that the power of his life is *redeeming* the world; though for the present it is only too plain that the world is not wholly redeemed? Consider the

force with which that Life once seized upon men, the beauty, the power, the splendour with which it reappeared in them. Could not St. Paul say quite simply and truly, "For me to live is Christ"? Could not the Twelve say it? Did not the power of that Divine Life raise and quicken even the vilest, so that mere publicans and harlots, nay, even Pharisees and priests, pressed into the kingdom of God? Clearly, the life of Christ *was once* a mighty power in the earth, and was capable of reproducing itself in the noblest and most heroic forms. Has it, then, lost its vigour by lapse of time? Often, no doubt, we fear that it has; but when this fear is upon us, do we not suffer the shadows which rise from within us to darken the scene around us? The world *is* for the most part worldly; and the Church *is*, for the most part, infected by the spirit of the world, and hastes to be rich, or defers to custom and the world's law in a way and to a degree wholly alien to the simplicity that is in Christ. But in the Church, if we find many who serve Mammon rather than God, or attempt to combine the service of God with that of Mammon—the most impossible of feats, do we not also find many who seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God: if we find many who defer to the world and the world's law, do we not find many who breathe the very spirit of Christ? We all know men who are genuinely good, men who have cheerfully renounced much that is dear to the flesh that they might serve God after the spirit. We have all met women who bore cruel pains or a life-long sorrow with a cheerful patience, who have found their happiness in

serving others, who have bravely faced all that was most repugnant to their nature in order to nurse the sick, or tend the wounded, or alleviate the miseries of the insane, the deformed, the outcast. *They* have drawn their inspiration from the life of Christ, from the Cross on which He revealed a love such as, till then, it had not entered the heart of man or woman to conceive.

And if we compare the very world as it *is* with the world as it *was* before He came into it, in that very proportion in which we know what the ancient world was like we shall see that his revelation of the Divine love has been as life from the dead. If we contrast the heavy, grinding, incessant tyranny of ancient times with the ordered and growing freedom of the modern world ; or if we contrast the brilliant, but frivolous and sensual, civilization of antiquity with the deep sense of moral responsibility, the careful consideration for the wants, the education, and even the amusements of the poor which mark the civilization of to-day ; or if we contrast the moral tone of ancient literature with that of the books now put into our hands, much as we may still find to condemn or deplore, we cannot but feel how much the world owes to Christ, how powerfully his life still works among men, raising and bettering the conditions even of those who will not have this Man to reign over them. No, the power of Christ's life is not exhausted. It is an inexhaustible fountain that runs on for ever. Thousands, millions, still drink of it — drink and live, and call others to the living stream. If He has not given *us* life, or if his life in us be weak and

flickering, *that* is not because He is no longer the true life of men ; but because, plunged in a thousand cares and occupations and amusements, we do not accept his revelation of the saving love of God and abide with Him.

We may look forward, then, with courage and hope. Assuredly there is no force at work in the world, so high, so pure, so potent as that revelation of God and of God's will which came by Jesus Christ. And shall not the purest and strongest of all the forces at work in the world conquer all other forces at the last, and assimilate to itself whatever is good in them and worthy to live ? If we believe in God at all, how can we believe that good will be overcome of evil, how can we but believe that evil will be overcome of good ? How can we but believe in the final victory of Him who came forth from the bosom of the Father to declare all the goodness of the Father to us and to all men ? Must not his interpretation of the will and purpose of God be the true interpretation ? Let us cleave to it, then, and rely upon it. For hopeful as it is, it is fraught with a hope that will never make us ashamed.



## XXVII.

### *THE MENACE OF ZEPHANIAH.*

"Sweeping, I will sweep everything from the face of the earth, saith the Lord. I will sweep away man and beast. I will sweep away the fowl of the heaven, and the fish of the sea, and their offences with the sinners : and I will cut off man from the face of the earth, saith the Lord."—ZEPHANIAH i. 2, 3.

IT would not be easy to find words more fully charged, and surcharged, with terror than these. They are as a great deep in which hope itself lies drowned ; and over the face of the deep there broods a darkness unrelieved by any ray of light.

Nor do they grow less sombre and dreadful as we consider either the men against whom they were launched, or the occasion that gave them form. In the time of Zephaniah the Jews were incredibly corrupt. They had plunged into all the superstitions of the neighbouring idolatries. They were infected with the most malignant forms of political and ethical disease. God was forgotten ; the book of the law, though written by the hand of Moses, was lost : the Temple desecrated and profaned. The nobles sported with treason ; the

priests ministered at the flagrant altars of Baal and Astarte: the people, "drawn together on their lees"—cradled on their lusts, on the very dregs and refuse of their nature—said in their hearts, "Who is Jehovah that we should serve Him? He neither doeth good to the good, nor evil to the evil." What was such a generation fit for but to be swept from the face of the earth with the besom of destruction?

And as from the moral condition of the men whom the Prophet denounced, so neither from the occasion which gave form to his denunciation, can we gather any hope. That occasion was the invasion of Asia by the Scyths. At the time when Zephaniah prophesied, the barbarous Scythian hordes had broken out from their pastures and steppes to storm across the most civilized states of the East. In a few simple but suggestive sentences Herodotus, the historian of the ancient world, tells us that these savage hordes "*burst* into Asia in pursuit of the Cimmerians whom they had driven out of Europe," and invaded the territory of the Medes. The Medes opposed them, but were defeated, and lost their empire. The Scythians then formed the design of invading Egypt. They stormed down through Syria and Palestine, striking off through the rich cities and commonwealths of Philistia on the South Western Coast. Here they "met" Psammetichus, king of Egypt, who was laying siege to Ashdod. By his gifts and prayers they were induced to resign their project of invading Egypt. But for eight and twenty years they remained masters of Asia, overrunning kingdom after kingdom, and passing

through Palestine again and again. "*Their insolence and oppression,*" says the Greek historian, "*spread ruin on every side. For, besides the tributes and imposts they exacted from the nations, they scoured the country and plundered every one of whatever they could.*" In these brutal but victorious hordes, the Cossacks and Pandours of antiquity, the Prophet saw "the besom of the Lord." As he looked out from the walls of Jerusalem, and saw the goodly land stripped and devoured before them, and recalled the havoc they had carried through neighbouring kingdoms, he found the very symbol of judgment which would best express his thought. Jehovah would sweep everything from the face of the whole earth, even as the Scythians, with fire and sword in their train, were sweeping away the fruits and the wealth of the East.

So far from growing less terrible, therefore, the words grow more terrible whether we consider the event which gave them form or the sins they were sent to rebuke: and we may fairly take them as a specimen of a large class of passages in Holy Writ which inspire us with fear and dread as we read them, because they seem wholly inconsistent with the Mercy in which we have learned to trust. Were we to search the whole Bible through, I doubt whether we should find any passage more dark and menacing than this. For the conception which it naturally suggests is that, angered beyond endurance by the sins of men, Jehovah is about to storm through the earth like a mighty Scythian Chieftain, destroying empire after empire, sweeping the whole world bare and empty. So that if I can shew you that after all these

words, when once we rightly understand them, breathe *a most catholic charity, a most tender humanity, and a mercy wholly divine*, you will admit, I think, that you ought to be very sure that you understand the real meaning of any other words in the Bible before you assume them to pourtray the Father of mankind in an attitude which contradicts the best and highest conceptions of Him you have been able to frame. Yet no one who has really studied Zephaniah, and entered into the spirit of his prophetic poem, will have any difficulty in proving all that I have undertaken to prove. We have only to suffer him to interpret himself in order to see that his words are dark simply through excess of light ; that, for all so threatening as they sound, they are full of tenderness and hope.

1. First, then, we are to find in these words *a most catholic charity*. It is unfortunate for the English reader that in this passage even our Revisers have only ventured to substitute "ground" instead of "earth" for the "land" of our Authorized Version, since neither of these words is large enough to convey the Prophet's meaning. That he was thinking not of one "land," nor of the "ground" occupied by a single race, is obvious from the breadth of his utterance and from its historical allusions. He derived his image of the "besom," or "broom," sweeping away man and beast, from the Scythian invasion ; and that was not confined to one land, but extended over the whole civilized world, over the whole world the Prophet knew. And if he took this image from the Scythian inroad, he took many of the words of my text from the

ancient story of the Deluge. In the Book of Genesis we read : " And the Lord said, *I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth ; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowl of the air.*" Obviously Zephaniah had these words in his mind when he wrote : "*Sweeping, I will sweep everything from the face of the earth : I will sweep away man and beast : I will sweep away the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea.*" What he contemplated was a judgment as wide as that which overwhelmed the ancient world ; a judgment that should include all nations and extend to every living thing. And, indeed, as his prophecy goes on, we hear him pronouncing doom not only on Judah and Jerusalem, but on Gaza and Ashdod and Ekron in the west ; on Moab and Ammon in the east ; on the Ethiopians in the far south ; and on the Assyrians of the north. In fine, he sweeps, in a wide circle, round the whole visible horizon, and sees the storm of judgment impending over it all.

But what do we gain by this ? How shall we prove the catholicity, the all-embracing charity, of the Prophet by proving that he denounces woe on all the kindreds of men ? Thus. We commonly conceive of the Hebrew prophets as the most narrow and exclusive of men, as devoted solely to the affairs and interests of the Hebrew race, as sternly exulting over the calamities which fell on alien tribes, as limiting their thoughts and hopes within the petty confines of the Hebrew commonwealth. And, in so conceiving of them, we do them a grave wrong. They *were* patriots indeed, and patriots of the sincerest

and noblest strain. But may not we Englishmen be patriots without hating the Americans, the Germans, the French, or even the Irish, and without exulting in the disasters which befall them? May we not love our own country very sincerely without craving its aggrandisement at the cost of other lands? In proportion as our patriotism is genuine and pure, we shall respect the patriotic emotions and aims of other races; in proportion as it is intelligent and wise, we shall desire the welfare of all races, knowing that only as all prosper can any one race rise to its full prosperity. And as we come to read the Hebrew prophets with intelligence, we find that *their* patriotism was as wise as it was sincere. Instead of being the most exclusive, they were the most catholic of men. There is no one of them who does not look beyond the limits of his own country and desire the welfare of the world. True, they pray for the prosperity of Zion, for the wellbeing of the sons of Abraham; but they never forget that, if the seed of Abraham is to be blessed, it is that his seed may become a blessing to all the families of the earth; that, if the House of the Lord is to be established on Zion, it is that all nations may flock into it. True, they utter the judgments which they denounce on alien races in a tone of stern exultation: but do they not take the same tone when they denounce judgment on Judah or Jerusalem? and *ought not* men of God to rejoice in the justice which God executes in the earth? and to rejoice in it all the more because they see, what we are so slow to see, that the Divine judgments veil a purpose of mercy, that they are intended to

purge men from their sins, and to lead in the happy day on which all nations shall serve God with one mind and one heart? And if they rejoice in the judgments of God, do they not still more heartily rejoice in his redemption? Joel, for example, sees, not without joy, that "all nations" will be gathered into the Valley of Doom, to receive the due reward of their deeds: but with what an extasy of joy does his heart break forth into singing as he sees that the Divine Spirit will be poured out on "all flesh," on young men and old, on bond and free? And Zephaniah dwells with a stern satisfaction on the judgment which is to sweep across the face of the whole earth. But why? Simply because he sees that all nations will be sanctified by judgment; that, by the very terrors which shake their hearts, God is turning to them a pure lip and leading them to serve Him with one shoulder?

Is not this the true charity — this love which can suffer and yet be strong? which can rejoice in tribulations also if by tribulation men are to be purged from evil and raised into the freedom and blessedness of obedience? Is not this the true catholicity, which desires not only the good of all men, but the highest good of all; which longs to see every race rising to its full height of capacity and welfare, in order that each may contribute to the common welfare and happiness? Be sure of this, my brethren, that till we can take cheerfully the discipline of sorrow and loss and pain by which we are chastened into the perfect liberty of obedience, until we can even endure to see those whom we love

suffer in order that they may be made free and pure and strong, we have less of the mind of Christ than the Hebrew prophets who only saw Him afar off.

2. We are to find in these words *a most noble and tender humanity*. They exalt man, and yet they take thought for beasts. They are at once human and humane.

With us of to-day it is too much the fashion to regard man as the mere creature of the vast natural and cosmic forces amid which he stands and moves. It is assumed that physical laws govern his whole being, and give form to his whole life ; that they determine the bent and scope of his mental faculties, the complexion of his thoughts, and mould his customs and even his religious superstitions or beliefs. In short, those men of science who have so little of the scientific spirit that they speak of that which they do not know and assume what they cannot prove, are apt to degrade man into the mere outcome and sport of the forces which compose the physical universe. The Hebrew prophets breathed another, and surely a higher, spirit. To them it seemed that man was the lord, not the obsequious slave or the helpless victim, of natural forces and laws ; that God had put all things under his feet ; but that nevertheless man himself was "under authority ;" that both he and the world were under the dominion, not of physical forces and sequences, but of an Allwise and Allgood Ruler who had subordinated the physical to the spiritual order, and was capable of convulsing the universe for the good of those whom He had created in his own image, after his own likeness.



Zephaniah, for example, had no doubt that God would shake heaven and earth, that He would sweep away beast and bird and fish, in order that He might do justice and shew mercy to men. And, surely, this high conception of man, as standing with only God above him and the whole world beneath his feet, though it was the conception of a pre-scientific age, accords with the profoundest intuitions and satisfies the deepest cravings of our hearts. We indeed may discern more clearly than the Hebrew seers that the physical and political catastrophes which they called "judgments" were not infractions of natural law, but fulfilments and illustrations of it. But cannot we also see that the calamities which result from violating law are in the truest sense "judgments" of God? If a man dies "before his time," because he *will* sin against the plain laws of health, does he not as truly die by the visitation of the God who ordained these laws as though he had been killed by a flash of lightning? If the inhabitants of a village will not submit to vaccination, and are decimated by the smallpox, is not that as truly a judgment of God as though every tenth person had perished in a storm or by a fire? If a nation runs in giddy wasteful riot after pleasure and show and self-indulgence, and goes down before the first foe that crosses its border, is not this as manifestly a judgment as a bad harvest, or an earthquake, or a tornado? Cannot we see for ourselves that every violation of natural and social laws is an offence against Him who decreed those laws, and that the punitive result of every such offence is his "judgment" on the

offender? And did not the Hebrew prophets see that too? see it perhaps even more clearly than we do? The sense of a Divine Law penetrating and pervading human life, and working out in blessing or in punishment according as it is obeyed or disobeyed, is the most conspicuous feature of their writings: and though they may express it in other than our modern forms, it is not yet quite certain that *our* forms are one whit truer to the fact than theirs. The form in which this conviction is held, indeed, matters but little, so long as we do hold it, so long as we believe that man is not the product and sport of blind cosmical forces, but that a Divine Law, a law ordained and administered by a God who loves us and is ever seeking our welfare, is shaping and elevating our life: for in *this* lies the true dignity and the true blessedness of man.

But if the Hebrew prophets are jealous for the honour of man; if they hold that all things are put under his feet, "all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea:" if they maintain that, so far from being the victim, man is the destined lord and ruler of the natural world—with what a genuine sympathy, with what a fine and tender humanity, do they take thought, and teach us to take thought, for "these poor relations of ours upon the carnal side," for all the creatures whom God has put under our feet, but not put under our feet that we may trample on them and spurn them! Here, too, according to the Prophets, he who would be lord of all must be the servant of all. Joel grieved for field and pasture, for

wheat and barley, for vine and figtree, consumed by the locusts; and for the flocks of sheep and the herds of oxen that wandered through meadows blackened as by fire, and beside streams dried up by drought. To him they seemed to "mourn the guilt" of the men who, by their sins, had provoked a judgment on the land. His heart is wrung as he contemplates their sufferings. "How the cattle groan!" he cries, as though the sound were more than he could bear: "the herds of oxen are bewildered, even the flocks of sheep do mourn the guilt. To thee, O Lord, do I cry, for these innocent and helpless victims of our iniquity" (Joel i. 10-12; 18-20)! And in precisely the same spirit Zephaniah regards the whole natural world as involved in the fate of man and suffering for his sins. Is "man" to be swept away from the face of the earth? So also is "beast"; so also are "the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea." Who but a Hebrew prophet would have had a thought to spare for beast and bird and fish in the presence of a judgment which was to sweep away "the kindly race of men"? How easy it would have been for him, and how natural to most of us, to take quite another tone! to have dwelt, for instance, on the barbarous and remorseless cruelty of the Scythian hordes, on the details of siege and assault, massacre and torture, plunder and ruin! That Zephaniah had a thought to spare for the innocent creatures who were to share in the terrors of the judgment proves him to be of one spirit with that goodly fellowship of Hebrew prophets whose joy in the fair world of nature, and whose tender sympathy for its inhabitants, is so marked and

so charming a characteristic. Habakkuk denounces as a heinous offence against Heaven the needless and wasteful havoc wrought by the Chaldeans in the famous cedar forest of Lebanon, and "the destruction and terror of the beasts" occasioned by the loss of their accustomed coverts. And there is hardly a prophet or a psalmist in whose words we may not find some instance of this thoughtful and tender consideration for field and wood, for bird and beast.

3. We are to find in these words, stern and judicial as they sound, *a mercy wholly divine*. All the Hebrew prophets are rooted and grounded in the conviction that the meaning of judgment is mercy, that all the sorrows and calamities of human life are designed to reach an end of compassion and love. The verse of the Psalmist, "Thou, O Lord, art merciful, *for* thou renderest unto every man according to his work," is the secret strain to which all their thoughts move and are attuned. Joel is sure that all nations will be brought into the Valley of Doom; but he is equally sure that they will be judged in order that God may shew Himself to be the stronghold and the sanctuary of the good, and pour out his Spirit on all flesh. The pencil of Habakkuk labours to depict the judgment that will fall on the nations which "exhaust themselves for vanity;" but he too can look beyond the terrors of judgment, and depict "the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the deep." Malachi foresees a day of the Lord which will burn like a furnace against all unrighteousness of men; but he also foresees that these

flaming judgments will kindle upon men only that "from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof" God's "name may be great among the nations," and that "in every place incense may be burned to his name and a pure sacrifice be offered" on his altars. And Zephaniah is possessed and sustained by this great conviction, this quickening and sustaining hope. He expresses it—somewhat briefly and obscurely indeed—in the words, "I will sweep away *their offences* with the sinners:" but even these brief enigmatical words indicate that the purpose of the far-sweeping judgment which the Prophet forecasts is *the removal of offences*, of sins and temptations to sin, the purification of the world and of human life. We are often told that even a good custom may corrupt the world. And if, by reason of long use, even good customs may lose their freshness, their vitality, and so corrupt instead of sanctify the world, we may be very sure that the world would soon perish under the accumulating mass of good customs out of which the life has died, and of bad customs whose very life is hostile and malignant, were it not for the changes, for the storms of calamity and rebuke, with which God, in his mercy, purifies the air we breathe. It is by these vicissitudes, by these "judgments," that, age, after age, as need requires, "the things that *can* be shaken" *are* shaken and removed, and the world is quickened to new life and vigour. Shakespeare says:

What custom wills, in all things should we do't,  
The dust on antique time would lie unswept,  
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd  
For truth to o'erpeer.

No radical change, however, no revolution, no reformation, whether in the history of men or nations, is an easy or agreeable process. You cannot assail old customs without shaking many prejudices. You cannot sweep away the dust of antique time without making a dust. And yet these radical changes, which for the time being are so painful and alarming, and often so terrible and retributive, afterward produce peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby. "Sinners" are swept away perhaps ; but so also are their "offences." The corrupt and corrupting customs of life and worship disappear in the judgment which storms across the face of the earth. Just as we build our houses and towns on an ampler scale, a better plan, a securer foundation, when fire has consumed the old streets and homes which we loved too well to alter, so, often, after we have passed through the fire of trial, we build our character, our convictions and habits, on firmer foundations and larger lines, and adapt them more perfectly to the wants of the new better time.

That it *was* the mercy of judgment which Zephaniah had in mind when he rejoiced that "their offences" were to be swept away with the sinners of his time, that *men* were to suffer in order that *man* might be saved, is evident so soon as we permit him to interpret himself. In passages of an exquisite tenderness and beauty he expands his opening words. He affirms that God makes Himself terrible only that "*all the isles of the heathen, every one from its place, may worship him*" (Chap. ii. 11). He affirms that God sweeps the earth

with fire, and smites the nations with his fury, in order that He may "*turn to the nations a pure lip, that they may all invoke the name of the Lord, and serve him with one consent*" (Chap. iii. 9). We cannot doubt, therefore, that he too rejoiced in judgment because he saw that mercy would rejoice over judgment.

And it was, I suppose, because the Hebrew prophets were so strong in this conviction of the beneficent uses of "judgments," that they could dwell on them, and even exult in them, as they undoubtedly do. Nothing, for example, is more painful and amazing to many minds than the way in which Zephaniah lingers over his description of the day of judgment. He elaborates it as though he relished the theme—adding touch to touch, piling epithet on epithet, as though he were reluctant to leave it, as though he took a sinister pleasure in contemplating it. As we mark the gusto with which he lingers on this day of anguish and distress, of desolation and ruin, of darkness and gloom, of clouds and of cloudy night, of the trumpet and the trumpet-blast—turning his theme like a savoury morsel under his tongue, we are ready to cry shame upon him, and to exclaim, "This man's God can never be our God!" Until we understand that Zephaniah believes judgment to be mercy, that he is depicting terrors through which he sees that men *must* pass if they are to be cleansed and redeemed, we can have no sympathy with him, and no real understanding of him.

But, if only for our own comfort and peace, we should try to understand him. For indeed, my brethren, I do

not see how we can face the facts of human life and hold fast our faith in God, unless we share Zephaniah's conviction, unless we too believe that God judges and afflicts men in order that He may cleanse and restore their souls. We shudder at the Prophet's description of the day of the Lord that was coming on Judah and Jerusalem, and coming to sweep everything from the face of the earth. But are such days to be found only in the Bible, or only in antique times? Did not such a day break on France, in our own time, with the German invasion; and on America, with the civil war? Might not a French or an American prophet, had there been one at hand, have taken up the very words of the Hebrew prophet, and have spoken of a day of fury, a day of anguish and distress, a day of desolation and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, of clouds and of cloudy night; a day of the trumpet and the trumpet-blast against the fortified cities and the lofty battlements; a day on which men should be brought into straits and walk like the blind, and discover with dismay that not even their silver or their gold could rescue them? Has not almost every nation in its time passed through such days of the Lord as this? Why, then, should we carp at Zephaniah's *words* when *facts* equally loaded with terror and gloom are a common staple of the human story? We ought, rather, to be thankful for his words. We ought to be thankful that even on a day so dark he could see a great light of hope, and teach us to see it.

Let us learn of him the mercy of the Divine judgments.



Let us hold fast to the conviction that even the judgments which are most penetrating and severe are only as the Surgeon's probe which carries a healing balm to the very seat of disease and pain ; that they simply sheathe and convey the saving health of the Divine Compassion and Love. Our very heart and flesh cry out for God, for the living God. We crave to see Him in our life, in our past history, in the very politics of the passing day. What *is* our life but an incessant conflict between the powers of the flesh and of the spirit? What is human history but the record of an incessant strife between the powers of darkness and of light? What are our politics but an incessant contention between opposing principles and their advocates? In these weary endless conflicts it cannot but be that we should encounter many sorrowful defeats, many searching judgments: And how can we encounter them with patience and hope save as we believe that the will of God penetrates and overrules the will of men, that He compels the very wrath of men to work out the redeeming purpose of his love, that his mercy apportions our judgments and constrains them to subserve our welfare, and that He is leading us and all men, through ages of strife and conflict, to the golden age of concord and peace? In this faith let us rest ; in this faith let us conquer. With Zephaniah, let us welcome and rely on the conviction that, when God sweeps the face of the earth, it is that He may renew the heart of the world, and gladden us with larger disclosures of his grace.

## XXVIII.

### *BUT WHERE ARE THE NINE?*

"Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"—  
LUKE xvii. 17.

As the Lord "Jesus Christ spoke the greatest things so simply that it seems as if He had never thought on them," so also He did the greatest things so modestly that it seems as if He wished to hide rather than to display them. He did not love to work miracles. He never wrought even one in order to be seen of men. Miracles were nothing to Him except as signs of Divine grace, on the one hand, and of human love and compassion, on the other. Hence his constant demand for faith. Only as men penetrated the outward wonders of his hands, only as they both recognized and desired the gracious redeeming energy which dwelt in Him; only as they felt, in the sign, the love which prompted the sign, could miracles do them any real and lasting good. Hence He habitually required faith of as many as were capable of exercising faith in Him, and in the Father who had sent Him.

We may be sure, therefore, that this demand was made on the ten lepers whom He healed as He "passed between the borders of Samaria and Galilee"—made, and met. Nay, if need be, we can prove that it was met. For though, unlike other lepers of whom we read in the Gospels, the ten did not run to Christ, and kneel at his feet; though they "stood afar off"—probably keeping, as the Jewish law required, a hundred paces distant from Him—and so gave Him no opportunity of laying his gracious and cleansing hand upon them, yet, from their distant post, they "lifted up their voices, and cried, Master, have mercy upon us!" And why should they have asked health *of Him*, if they did not believe that He could give them health? So, again, when, with a certain cheerful encouragement in his tone—easily discernible in the Original, though veiled from us in our translation, He cries back to them, "Go, shew yourselves to the priests," they once more prove their faith by an instant obedience to his command. And, as they go, their faith is rewarded: they feel new tides of health flowing back into their dead flesh and rotting bones.

Yet only one, moved by gratitude and love, returns to glorify God, and to give thanks to Jesus. Only one, therefore, hears the gracious words, "Thy faith hath *made thee whole*," or, as the Greek means, "Thy faith hath *saved thee*." For a man is neither "saved," nor made "whole," by being made sound in body. Whatever his "faith," no man is a whole or a saved man until faith has unsealed the fountains of wonder and thankfulness and love within him. Better that the body

be consumed by the most loathsome disease, so that the soul be in health and prosper, than that a soul dead to wonder and gratitude and love should dwell in the healthiest of frames and the happiest outward conditions. For the soul has the power of weaving a body, and even many bodies, for itself, and is always, I suppose, busily weaving for itself the "spiritual body" in which it will abide when once it has "shuffled off this mortal coil." Sooner or later the body *must* come right if only the soul be right with God. So that these nine thankless lepers—cleansed, but not saved; healed, and yet not made whole—had far better have remained lepers if their misery would have helped to make whole or complete men of them, if it would have helped to "save" them, by making them feel their need of God, and by drawing them nearer to the Fountain of all love and goodness.

As we consider their case, we cannot but ask: "How could men so happy be so thankless? How could men who had so much faith, nevertheless have so little faith—faith in the Healer, yet not in the Saviour?" It seems but natural that men who had received so great a boon at the hands of Christ should be overwhelmed with gratitude to Him. It seems but natural that the faith they had, nourished by a gift so large and free, should grow by what it fed upon. To us at least, judging them from a distance, all this seems so natural, that we are puzzled to understand why, when they were cleansed, they did not at once turn upon their steps, and fling themselves at the feet of the Healer, and thank Him for

what He had done for them with streaming eyes and voices broken with emotion. Had He not proved Himself "the Life indeed" by rescuing them from the loathsome arms of death? And might they not have inferred that He had words which it would be "eternal life" for them to hear? It puzzles and distresses us to think that men should be so dull, so slow of heart, so thankless, so dead to all the higher emotions and aims. It would not have cost them much to thank their Healer. It would have cost them less than we may suppose. For they had not, as we may have imagined, to travel from the northern border of Samaria to Jerusalem in order to "shew themselves to the priests," and then travel back into Galilee to find Him. Any priest was competent to examine them, and to pronounce them cured: and the priests, except for their brief turn of service in the Temple, were scattered through the land. Moreover, they felt that they were "cleansed" *before* they reached the priests; and the Samaritan seems to have turned the instant he "saw that he was healed," and to have found Jesus in the very spot at which he had left Him. Why, then, did they not all yield to the natural and gracious instinct by which *he* was impelled, and return to thank and bless the Master who had had compassion on them?

My brethren, we must find the answer to that question in our own experience—in which we may easily find only too much which will enable us to answer it.

First of all, and in the most general terms, we may say that there are many men even now who, like the nine

thankless lepers, have faith enough for the health of the body, or even for all the conditions of outward comfort and success, but have not faith enough to secure the health and prosperity of the soul. That is to say, there are many who believe in so much of the will of God as can be expressed in sanitary laws and in the conditions of commercial success, but who do not believe in that Will as it is expressed in the laws and aims of the spiritual life. They believe health to be a great good, as indeed it *is* ; and they believe success in business to be a great good, as indeed it *may be* : and hence they carefully study and carefully observe the laws by which health and success are conditioned. They would not willingly violate any one of them that they know. They earnestly wish that they knew them all, and so could secure health and command success. But when the will of God rises into a higher sphere, and expresses itself in higher forms ; when He assures them that spiritual soundness is far more valuable than physical health, and that treasure in heaven is worth more than all the wealth of earth, they do not believe Him : some of them will even smile and say that no man, can or does, honestly believe that. St. John's wish for his friend Gaius, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health *according as thy soul prospereth*," is a mystery to them ; and it may be doubted whether they would care to have even St. John for a friend if he were constantly beseeching God to give them health of body only in proportion to their health of soul, and prosperity in business only in pro-

portion to their growth in faith and righteousness and charity. With their strong grasp of outward things, they find it impossible to believe that all that a man has beyond what he can use for the best and noblest ends is simply a burden to him and a snare. And hence, however careful they may be of their physical health, and however eager for success, they do not study the laws which condition health and wealth of soul, much less observe them.

You all know such men as these. And so long as you know them, and feel that you are yourselves in some measure touched with their incapacity for spiritual things, you need not be much surprised at the Lepers who had faith enough for healing, but not faith enough for salvation ; faith enough to be glad that they were physically sound, but not faith enough to see that they were spiritually unsound, and to feel that, so long as their spiritual unsoundness continued, mere health of body was but a doubtful good.

But, besides this general consideration—which, however, goes far to bring their conduct within the ordinary limits of human action—if we look at the case of these nine lepers a little more closely, we shall find only too much in ourselves and our neighbours to explain their ingratitude, or, at least, to make it both credible and admonitory to us.

1. They may have thought that they had done nothing to deserve their horrible fate, or nothing more than many of their neighbours, who yet passed them by as men accursed of God ; and that, therefore, it was only

*just* that they should be restored to health. And, so strange and mysterious are the ways of God with men, it may be quite true that some of them *had* done nothing, or nothing special, to provoke a doom so terrible. They may have been suffering for the sins of their fathers—through an hereditary taint of blood, or from unwise nurture and breeding; or even from the ignorance of the physicians or the bad sanitary and social conditions of the time. Lepers were not necessarily sinners above all other men; they were often more sinned against than sinning. And until Christ had taught us that, in calling us to suffer for the sins of others, God is doing us the honour of associating us with Himself, and permitting us to take up the Cross of Him who bare the sin of the world, how can we wonder if men often thought themselves unjustly used, and felt that it was only right and fair that they should be delivered from forms of suffering which they had not provoked?

If we do wonder at them, let us look within and around us, and see if, even now that the Cross has stood among us for eighteen centuries, we are much wiser and better than they. Are there not still many, and many fairly good, men among us who in their hearts regard every loss or trouble which befalls them as a wrong, and who take every success and blessing as their due? Nay, is there any one of us who has not felt wronged when he has lost money for which he had toiled, or met with an accident which robbed him of the health he had been careful to cherish, or found his neighbours suspecting



him of a meanness, an injustice, a selfishness, of which he knew himself to be incapable? Which of us has not assumed some form of success and advancement to be due simply to his own ability, or industry, or integrity, the purely natural consequence of his own virtues or endeavours? We may shrink from putting the feeling into words; we may neither go about the world whining over the undeserved misfortunes and calamities we have to bear, nor boasting that we are *self-made* men, men who owe none of our successes whether to God or to our neighbours: but if we do not openly lament over our unmerited losses and crosses, or openly triumph over our successes as fairly and honourably earned, yet which of us has not felt wronged and injured by some loss or suffering which we have been called to face, and pleasantly tickled and flattered by some form of prosperity, as though we had taken it captive by our own bow and spear? Which of us habitually regards every loss and sorrow that comes to us both as a gracious discipline by which God is making us perfect, and as an honour conferred upon us by Him who is Himself afflicted in all the afflictions of men, and who, in calling us to suffer for the sins of some of our neighbours, permits us to fill up the remnant of his afflictions? Which of us habitually regards every success we win both as the gift of *his* providence without whom no man is wise, no man strong, and as a sacred trust imposed on us for the benefit of our fellows?

While so many ignore that Providence, or even resent its decrees, we need not be overmuch surprised if the

nine lepers did assume that they had been unjustly handled, and that it was but fair that they should be delivered from their doom so soon as God, or the Prophet of God, had time to look into their case.

2. They may have thought that they would at least *make sure* of their restoration to health before they gave thanks to Him who had healed them. True, there was a new vigour and sweetness in their blood ; the distorted and defaced features had regained their former comeliness ; and the clear rosy hues of health were coming back to their dead white flesh. But would it last? Was the cure complete? Would the priests pass them? Would their friends welcome back those whom they had long since mourned as dead, and whom by this time they might have displaced and wellnigh forgotten?

Ah, my friends, I am not justifying these ungrateful men: I am but admonishing myself and you of sins that may be in *our* nature, when I demand: Was it not natural that they should ask themselves such questions as these, and conclude that, since they could thank the Master at any time, it would be well to wait till they were quite sure they had a real and enduring blessing to thank Him for?

Assuredly there *are* men who put off giving thanks to God even for "the blessings of this life," until they have none to give. There are men who put off seeking life eternal from Him to whom they owe *this* life until it is, if not too late, at least too late for us to know that they have sought and found it. It is not that they do not value the gifts of God, or that they *mean* to be un-

grateful to Him. On the contrary, they have a general and diffused conviction that they owe all they have to Him, and a general intention of thanking Him from their hearts some day, and even of asking Him, who has been so good to them in this world, to fit them for the world to come. But they are too "busy here and there," too occupied in storing up and securing "much goods for many years" to think as they ought of the Author of every good gift; and, consciously or unconsciously, they have made up their minds to see this life pretty well through before they prepare in earnest for another.

Do you not all know such men? not sceptics, not *disbelievers*, but simply *unbelievers*—prosperous and successful men who don't think much, and who don't mean to think much, of God or of the life to come until they have made sure of this life, and have got out of it pretty much all that it can yield them? If you do, you need not throw up your hands in horror and surprise at the ungrateful lepers of Galilee: you can easily match them in the narrow circle of your own acquaintance, even if you do not find that which only too closely resembles them in your own heart.

3. They may have put *obedience before love*. They may have argued—for where is the man who cannot make some plausible excuse to himself for not acting on his best and purest impulses?—"The Master bade us go and shew ourselves to the priests. Let us go on, then, although we feel ourselves already healed. To do as He commanded us will be the best way of thanking Him for what He has done for us."

Even if *they* did not, there are many who do argue thus ; many who have a faith which expresses itself in formal obedience and formal worship, rather than in love and in the services and courtesies of love. And yet, when the Samaritan turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God and gave thanks to Jesus, how sorrowfully Christ asks, "Were there not ten cleansed ? Where, then, are the nine ? Were there not found *any* who would return to give glory to God save this alien ?" To Him, even duty is of little worth until it is inspired by love. A loving disobedience to the letter of his command is better than an unloving obedience to it ; for a loving disobedience to the letter, is often a loving obedience to the spirit, of his command. His first and chief requirement upon us is, "Give me thine *heart*, Give me the love which, in order to fulfil, can even break the law. Give me the warm living affection which, while it can express itself in dutiful obedience, can also follow its own sweet impulse, and lose itself in wonder, love, and praise." Now *why* does He make this demand upon us ? Mainly, if not simply, for our own good. He would have had all the lepers come back to Him, that He might have conferred a far higher gift on them than health—high as that is, that He might have said to them all, as He did say to one, "Thy faith hath *saved* thee." For till faith blossoms into love—love for God and man—we are not saved, we are not quickened into our highest and only true life. And that, not in virtue of any capricious Divine decree, but by the very necessity of our nature. *For we are so made that nothing*

*but love*—the love which lays hold of and responds to the fatherly redeeming love of God—*can save us*, save us from the selfishness which lies at the root of all our sins. In vain do we observe the most approved forms of law and worship. If love be wanting, we miss our highest life, our highest good. We *are* nothing, and have profited nothing even by the teaching and example of Christ Himself.

4. The nine were Jews; the tenth a Samaritan: and it may be that *they* would not go back *just because he did*. Misery had broken down the hereditary and cherished enmity of their hearts, as it often will. But no sooner is the pressure of misery removed than the old enmity flames out again, and the Jews take one road, the Samaritan another.

And *that*, again, is not so strange a phenomenon that we should greatly wonder at it. Even men who are one at heart, as well as one in blood, one even in their main convictions and beliefs, will not walk together unless they are also agreed in opinion (and even in opinions which they confess to be of no grave moment) except under the pressure of a great danger or a great misery. When the Stuarts were on the throne, and a steadfast endeavour was made to impose the yoke of Rome on the English conscience, Churchmen and Non-conformists forgot their differences; and as they laboured in a common cause, and fought against a common foe, they confessed that they were brethren, and vowed that they would never be parted more. But when the danger was past, these vows were forgotten; and once

more they drew apart, and remain apart to this day. If any grave danger to our common faith were to reappear, if days of persecution and misery were to return upon us, no doubt we should once more brush our differences out of the way, and, remembering that we have one Lord and one faith, should even forget that we have two baptisms—presenting a common front to the common foe. But when the foe was defeated, in our hour of triumph, who can be sure that we should not separate again, and find in the mere fact that some of our quondam brethren took one path a sufficient reason for taking the other?

5. Finally, the nine ungrateful because unloving Lepers may have said within themselves: "We had better go on our way, and do as we are bid, for we can be just as thankful to the kind Master in our hearts *without saying so to Him*; and we can thank God anywhere, thank Him just as well while we are on our way to the priests, or out here on the road and among the fields, as if we turned back. The Master has other work to do, and would not care to be troubled with our thanks; and as for God—God is everywhere; here as well as there."

They may have thought *so*: and if they did, have we to go far to find a modern parallel? Not far assuredly: for, doubtless, the very words I have put into their mouths have suggested such a parallel to you. Of those who believe in God to-day, who acknowledge that they owe all they have to his bounty, and who look to Him for all the blessings of the life to come as well as for all

the blessings of this life, there are some who do not care to worship Him—at least with their brethren. They plead that God is confined to no place; that He is everywhere present, beholding the evil and the good, and, beholding, that He may overcome evil with good. They plead that worship may be independent of forms—may even be all the purer because it is not formal. And they profess that, for themselves, they find more of Him in the fair temple of Nature than in any temple made with hands, and can worship Him more truly as they walk through field and wood than when they enter a sanctuary.

Now it would not become us, who also believe that God is everywhere, and that He may be most truly worshipped both in the silence of the heart and amid the noise and bustle of the world, to deny that He may be worshipped in the fair temple of Nature, where all his works praise Him. It would not become us to deny even that some men *may* find Him in wood and field as they do not find Him in a congregation or a crowd. But, surely, it does become us to suggest to those who take this tone that, just as we ourselves love to be loved and to know that we are loved, so God loves our love to become vocal, loves that we should acknowledge our love for Him; and that, not merely because He cares for our praise, but because our love *grows* as we shew and confess it, and because we can only become “perfect” as we become perfect in love. It, surely, does become us to remind them that no man can truly love God unless he love his brother also; and that,

therefore, the true lover of God should and must find in the worship of brethren whom he loves his best aid to the worship of their common Father. He who finds woods and fields more helpful to him than man is not himself fully a man ; he is not perfect in the love of his brother, and is not, therefore, perfect in the love of God. If he loved God as he ought, he would love his brother as he ought ; and if he loved his brother as he ought, he would find *in him* the best aid and companion in the worship of God, and would remember that he himself might be a valuable companion and help to the worship of his brethren.

How many warnings and admonitions, then, have we received from our study of this incident in the ministry of our Lord ! We have learned from it that we ought to care far more for health of soul than for health of body, and to seek it more diligently. We have learned that, instead of resenting our losses as wrongs and assuming our successes to be our due, we ought to regard our losses and sufferings as both a gracious discipline by which God is making us perfect, and as an honourable summons to fill up that which is behind of the affliction of Christ : while our successes and prosperities should be taken both as the gifts of God's bounty and as a sacred trust for the benefit of our fellows. We have learned that we should not postpone our quest for eternal life as long as we can, but, rather, set out on it as soon as we can. We have learned that, if obedience is more than sacrifice, love is more than mere obedience, and that our very obedience becomes



acceptable to God in that very proportion in which it is inspired by love. We have learned that we should be of one heart with all who love God, not only under the pressure of a common danger or a common misery, but also when the skies are clear and all goes well with us. And we have learned that Man should be more to us than the whole round of Nature, and that in the worship of our fellowmen we should find our keenest incentive to worship our Lord and theirs, our Father and theirs.

## XXIX.

### *THE SPRING AND ITS MAKER.*

“And ye make a basin between the walls for the water of the old pool ; but ye do not look to him who made it, nor have respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.”—ISAIAH xxii. 11.

DURING the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, Sennacherib led the Assyrian army to the conquest of Egypt, intending to reduce “the feeble Jews” on his way. He swept through the southern province of Palestine, and laid siege to Lachish, then a fortress of some strength. Lachish was only five and twenty miles south of Jerusalem ; and, with the Assyrian host encamped so near them, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were in constant fear lest it should advance against them. Their fear was verified. Detained longer than he expected before the walls of Lachish, Sennacherib detached an army, under one of his generals, to besiege and subdue the neighbouring metropolis. Many of its leading citizens, many even of the garrison, lost heart and fled before the city was invested ; and were seized, and sold as slaves, by the Assyrian troops. Even Hezekiah and the princes who stood by him, although they had entered into an

alliance with Egypt which bound them to resist Assyria to the uttermost, were so moved by fear that, rather than stand a siege, they emptied the royal treasury, and even gutted the Temple of "all its silver," to purchase an ignominious peace.

It is to this period that the opening verses of our Chapter refer ; these are the facts which give a graphic force to the words (Verses 1-3) : "*What aileth thee, then, that thou art wholly gone to the housetops, O thou that art full of stirs, tumultuous city, exulting city! Thy slain are not slain with the sword, nor slaughtered in battle. All thy rulers, fugitives together, are bound without drawing bow ; all thy captured ones, fleeing far away, are bound.*" With an enemy so formidable at hand, hidden from them only by a range of hills, the inhabitants of Jerusalem might well haunt their flat housetops, and peer anxiously southward to see if there were any signs of an advance against them. There were factions in the State, one headed by Shebna, and another by Eliakim ; the former counselling submission, the latter urging resistance. And, therefore, the city was full of "stirs" — full of rumours, broils, commotions, party-cries and strifes. But "the more part" were for submission. And when the King was persuaded to send tribute to the Assyrian, "the tumultuous city" became an "exulting city": released from their fears, the clamorous citizens rose into a frenzy of joy. No doubt their joy was soon clouded as they bethought them of the losses they had sustained, as they remembered how many of their nobles and warriors, fleeing

from danger, had fallen into shame, and had been taken captive without so much as drawing their bows against the enemy, without striking a single blow for freedom ; and yet they could not but rejoice over their own escape.

It was this base joy which caused the prophet Isaiah the deepest grief. As he had protested against the Egyptian alliance, so also he had protested against paying tribute to the Assyrian. He had exhausted himself in passionate appeals to the king and to the people ; bidding them put their trust in God, not in man ; beseeching them not to fling away their freedom at the prompting of fear ; assuring them that, if they trusted in God, He would save them. But his appeal had been wasted on men beside themselves with terror. The tribute was sent, Israel enslaved ; the servants of the Great King had sold themselves to a foreign despot. And now they were making merry ; they were exulting in their shame. Slaves at heart, they did not even regret the freedom they had lost.

It is for this that Isaiah mourns, refusing to be comforted. That the freemen of the Lord should clank their chains, and dance to that shameful music, well-nigh broke his heart. "*Turn from me,*" he cries. "*Look away from me, that I may weep bitterly. Do not attempt to comfort me—there is no comfort for a grief like mine : for the daughter of my people is despoiled*" (Verses 4, 5).

As he mourns and complains, as he reflects on the sordid and degenerate spirit of a people once so brave, he loses all hope for them. Nothing but the utmost

severities of judgment can cleanse them from their shame, or lift them from their degradation. He *had* hoped that, under so good a king as Hezekiah, the old patriotism and the old devotion to God might be re-quickened. But he can hope no longer. The future is all dark for slaves who can rejoice and exult in their bondage. And in that great darkness he dimly discerns the omens of a coming and inevitable doom. He watches and considers these omens till they take definite form, and yield him the terrible forecast with which they are fraught. What he foresees is a day of trouble, of trampling down, of wild confusion, from the Lord of hosts ; a day on which the walls of Jerusalem, spared for the present, will be broken down, and the bitter wail of the city, in its death agony, will be echoed from the mountains which stand round about it (Verse 5). From Elam to *Ḥir*, from north to south of the vast Assyrian empire, a mighty and irresistible host will be gathered. They will strap on the quiver ; they will draw out the shield from its leathern case ; they will ride on horses and chariots (Verse 6). They will swarm in all the valleys—Kidron, Gihon, Rephaim, Hinnom—outside the walls of Jerusalem (Verse 7). The besieged citizens will have made what hasty preparations for the siege they could. The “covering,” the veil of Judah, which hid the danger from their eyes, will be stripped off. They will run to the forest-house, the armoury built by Solomon, to see what store of arms is left in it (Verse 8). They will have discovered that there are many “breaches” in the city of David—the upper part of Jerusalem. They will

number the houses, to see how many can be spared, and pull down all that can be spared, in order to get stone and timber for repairing the breaches in the wall (Verses 9 and 10). They will dig a basin, or reservoir, within the walls, in which to collect water from the lower and upper pools, or springs, which rise in the western valley of Gihon, that they may not perish of thirst.

And, then,—ah, what will they do then? Even yet it is not too late to turn to the Lord. God sends all these calamities and threatenings of calamity as incentives to repentance. It is their selfishness and injustice and venality, their frauds on the poor, their neglect of public duties, their want of public spirit, their indifference to the public weal, which have impoverished and enfeebled them. If they will even now repent of their sins, turn to God, put their trust in Him, and walk in his ways, He will save them: "*In that day the Lord calleth to weeping and to mourning,*" and to the usual signs of Oriental grief—"to plucking off the hair and to girding with sackcloth" (Verse 12).

But God is not in any of their thoughts. Even when they carry in the water of the Gihon spring and store it up between the walls, they are only glad to get the water; they do not "*look to him who made the spring, nor have respect to him who fashioned it long ago.*" And hence, instead of mourning and weeping and purposing amendment, they repeat their old sins. As has often been the case since, in times of siege or plague or famine, with those who have no living hope in the living God, they give themselves to a ghastly revelry

and mirth. Their enemies are thundering at the gates. The dead strew the streets. Famine stalks from house to house. But they eat flesh and drink wine, in a last orgy, to the desperate strain of "*Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*" (Verses 12, 13).

All this, though as yet it was far distant, the Prophet sees and describes as if it were present. And, as he contemplates it, his heart grows sick with despair. He can cherish no hope for his race. It *must* perish, for it deserves to perish (Verse 14): "*Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts.*"

It is a moving and a dreadful tragedy: but I have touched its tragic notes, not merely that I might briefly expound a very difficult passage, but mainly that I may call your attention to one incident in it, and to the lesson with which it is fraught for us and for all men. That Spring outside the western wall of Jerusalem was the gift of God. *He* made it. He fashioned it long ago. He meant it to lift the thoughts of those who drank of its pure sweet stream to Him of whose sweetness and purity it was an imperfect type. And thus He conferred a double benediction on them; for if it is much to the thirsty to have water to drink, it is much more to drink the water as from the hand of God. Living water and the beautiful spring grow infinitely more precious to us when they speak to us of the living God, and remind us of his unstinted and perennial bounty. For we live not by bread alone, nor by water alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the

mouth of God. It is his Word, *i.e.* it is the vital effluence of his creative and quickening power in and through the water and the bread, which alone gives them their nourishing and sustaining qualities. He must "quicken" us and them, He must quicken us by them, or we shall die, even though our bread be sweet and our water pure. And so soon as we fail to recognize his goodness in the common gifts of life, and our dependence on it, they lose their prime virtue for us; they no longer carry their deepest message, or confer their benediction upon us. They may even become injurious, nay, fatal, to us. For merely to exist, merely to have enough to eat and drink, is not life *for a man*; all that is best and noblest in life has left us if we can be content with this. We are not doing a man's work in the world, nor filling a man's place, nor fitting ourselves for a man's destiny. We have sunk below the level of humanity. We have lost that "high discourse of reason which looks before and after;" for we no longer look back to the origin of our life nor forward to the life which is to be: we are content with the passing hour, and its base transient pleasures. If our abundance helps to confirm us in this infra-human and bestial mood; if because we have, or think we have, "much goods for many years," we forget God our Maker and the eternity we are to spend with Him, the sooner we lose it the more likely are we to come to ourselves, to regain our proper manhood. For then, when we have no resource but in God, we may rise into a more human life; we may take all we receive as the gifts of



his Fatherly bounty and love : we may live as sons in our Father's house, instead as the slaves of our own sordid cravings and lusts.

We *may* ; and also we may *not*. But at least this is the Divine intention in impoverishing and afflicting us, that we should walk after the spirit and not after the flesh. When He suffered the Jews to feel all the horrors of siege and famine, when He imposed on them the labour of bringing the water of the Spring within the walls, He meant them *to think of Him who made it*. In their ease and abundance they had forgotten Him. But now, now that water was scarce and life depended on it, they might remember and thank Him who had fashioned it long ago.

Now this thought, this conviction, that God sends our losses, sorrows, bereavements, upon us for our good, that we may rise to our true life and our true blessedness in Him, is so valuable to us that, familiar as it is, every new illustration of it is welcome to us and helpful. The conviction is so precious to us, so fraught with comfort and hope, that we are slow to admit and cherish it, lest after all it should not prove to be true. And, therefore, I must ask you to note that it is not only implied in the reproach that the Jews, though they were glad of its water, did not look to Him who made the spring, nor have respect unto Him who fashioned it long ago. It is also clearly and definitely stated by the inspired Prophet ; so that if we believe him to have spoken by the inspiration of God, or even if we only believe him to have possessed a far deeper insight than ours into the

meaning of the ways of God with men, we cannot refuse to take the comfort He offers us. Through all the confusions of that day of trouble and perplexity which was about to dawn on Jerusalem, through the crash of the shattered walls and the wail of agony echoed back from the surrounding hills, he heard the voice of God calling the reckless and despairing Israelites to weeping and mourning, to repentance and amendment. He saw that what God meant by inflicting these calamities upon them was not their destruction, but their salvation ; not death, but redemption from their death in vice and sin. Had they been sorry for their guilty past, their very sorrow would have been the beginning of a new and better life. They might still have lost their city ; for repentance does not necessarily avert the natural consequences and results of vice and crime ; but to have become freemen in heart and spirit, to have known themselves as children and friends of God, would have been infinitely better for them than to keep their city while they were slaves in heart—slaves to fear, and passion, and lust. It was only because they did not listen to the Divine call ; it was only because instead of repenting and amending their ways, they gave place to despair and a reckless mirth, that God left them to themselves, with an iniquity from which only death could purge them. Even death was true mercy for them in that case : for if they could not be purged from their iniquity "until they died," the sooner they died the better for them and for the world they were doing so much to corrupt.

Let us assure our hearts before Him, then : let us settle and establish ourselves in the conviction that when God permits trouble and loss, fear and grief, to come upon us, it is not because He has ceased to care for us, but because He loves us ; it is not that He would have us die, but that we may turn and live : it is not because He grudges us any good or even any pleasure, but because He would have us seek his best gifts and confer upon us a true and unfailing joy. Every stroke of the rod is a call to penitence and amendment.

We ought not to need his strokes. If He has opened any spring of living water to us, we surely ought, so often as we drink of it, to remember Him who made it long ago. Yet, as we all know, we are very apt to forget Him. If He has given us a daily work to do and health to do it ; if He has given us happy homes in which we dwell with those who are kind and dear to us ; if He has given us easy conditions, wise books, cheerful amusements, the means and power to do a little good, we do not formally deny that these are his gifts ; but we often accept and enjoy them in a thoughtless and forgetful way very injurious to our spiritual health and welfare. We do not suffer them to speak to us of Him : and thus we miss the best things they could bring us—the assurance of his fatherly and watchful love, and an incentive to live a godly life. Insensibly, and without any settled evil intention on our part, our whole life contracts and lowers, and we pass our days more like ants or bees than men. Partakers of a divine nature, heirs of immortality, we sink into the creatures of a

day, and are content if only the day be bright, and the sun shine, and our conscience disturb us with no alarms.

And there is one phrase in my text which goes far to explain this base forgetfulness and content. The Jews did not remember the God who had fashioned the spring "*long ago*." In all probability it was *because* He had fashioned it so long ago that they had ceased to remember Him, as they would not and could not have done had He, to meet their extremity, suddenly caused a new spring to bubble up within their walls. For, beyond a doubt, *we* often forget to whom it is we owe our gifts mainly because we have so long enjoyed them. "Use doth breed a habit in a man," and, alas, a habit of forgetfulness. The duties of business, the comforts of home, the pleasure of intercourse with those who live in it, daily meals and daily repose; nay, even the comforts of Religion, and the services and sacraments of the Church—we are familiar with all these. We have enjoyed them so long that we take them without much thought, without any keen emotion of gratitude, even if we have not come to regard them, or some of them, as by no means essential to our welfare and happiness. When they were fresh to us, when we were not sure of them or accustomed to them; when we first set up in business for ourselves, when we took home wife or husband for the first time; when the first baby was born; when we joined the Church or our hearts first opened to the sacred influences of Religion, we had some grateful and pious thoughts. We felt and acknowledged that God

was very good to us, or even wonderfully good and kind. We asked Him to guard, direct, and bless us. We resolved to remember Him, and to do our duty as in his sight. But that was "long ago." We are accustomed to our blessings now, and they seldom stir in us thoughts and emotions that lie too deep for words, too deep even for tears. The flush of that early gratitude and devotion has passed, and very seldom recurs. We drink water from the Spring every day; but we no longer look up, in faith and love, to Him who made it.

Now it is at this point, when custom has staled our mercies, and we are sinking toward an irrational and godless life, that God afflicts us, afflicts that He may save us. He troubles the water of the spring; but it is for our healing; or He makes it hard to get, that we may value it the more, and not forget Him who fashioned it. Our days are made uneasy to us. The tenure, on which we have been wont to hold our good things so securely and indifferently, becomes insecure. Changes fall upon us in quick succession. Health fails us, or our business no longer goes to our mind; our work does not prosper; wife or husband sickens; a child errs or dies; doubts and fears assail us; opportunities of religious teaching or worship are taken from us: in a word, our home life or our church life is troubled or broken up. And we are startled out of our thoughtless security, our indifference, our unemotional and thankless reception of the gifts and blessings to which we had grown accustomed. It is as though the solid earth had

quaked beneath our feet. It is as though an enemy had come up against us, putting all that we value most to imminent hazard. "Ah, if the earth should *give*, if the enemy should *prevail*, our whole life would be darkened with loss; embittered by unavailing regrets! Lord, save us from these perils, and we will never forget Thee more!" Thus we sigh, thus we cry unto God, in our prayer. That is, this is our cry if we hear God's voice in the day of trouble and perplexity which has darkened over us, and understand that He is calling us to repentance and amendment.

But there are men who have grown so dull, in the dull mechanic round of their days, that they do *not* hear when God calls, and do not want to hear. When trouble comes on them, they do not remember God their Maker, Giver of songs in the night. As their troubles thicken and darken, they grow desperate. They harden themselves against God. They snatch eagerly at what poor revelry is still left to them, and hide their despair under a mirth sadder than tears, more terrible than the wildest grief. For when a man has wholly ceased to look unto God, when he has lost all hope for himself and cares only to forget himself, there is no remedy for him, at least on this side the grave. "His iniquity cannot be purged until he die." Beyond our reach, we must leave him in the hands of Him who made him, and who has *not* forgotten him, although He fashioned him long ago. With tears, and with long-drawn sighs of compassion, we follow him to the tomb, happy that, even in thought, we can follow him no further; for he on

whom God's severest mercies have failed to take effect, if recoverable at all, can only be recovered through pangs which *our* love is not strong enough to contemplate.

These, then, are the two chief modes in which we are afflicted by the discipline of life. We may be hardened by it; and, in our despair of goodness and peace, we may sink into a sensuality which will speedily avenge itself upon us—sowing to the flesh till, in corruption, we reap its natural fruit. Or, as God intends, we may be softened by it, and won to penitence and amendment. We may remember Him who made us, and whom we have too much forgotten. Remembering Him, we may come to ourselves, our better selves. We may confess our sins, and be forgiven even before the confession is complete. Once forgiven, we may grow thoughtful and obedient, blessing Him who has opened the well of salvation for us so often as we drink of its living and healing waters. And this happier result is that which God means discipline to produce upon us. This is his aim in exposing us to it. Even when He comes to us clothed in judgment, He comes not to condemn, but to save us.

### XXX.

#### THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—ISAIAH i. 18.

CONSCIOUS, as we are, of many and heinous sins, no promise would be more welcome to us than this, if only we could honestly believe it. But do we, can we, believe it ? If men are stained with the crimson and scarlet hues of gross and habitual transgressions ; if, like the Jews to whom this invitation was originally addressed, they have been smitten and chastised for their sins till the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint, while yet the more they have been stricken the more they have rebelled (Verses 4-6), is it possible that God should either *make* them as white as snow, or *treat them as if* they had been washed from all their stains ?

If we are to accept the Divine invitation, and to “reason” together with God, must we not tell Him that his promise seems incredible to us ? To many, at least, it is so incredible that a recent and learned commentator (Rowland Williams *in loco*), a minister moreover



of the Church which enjoins its members to profess "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," translates the verse thus : "Come, now, and let us plead together, saith Jehovah : if your sins be as scarlet, *let them be* as white as snow ; if they redden like crimson, *let them be* as wool." That is to say, he finds in the Verse, not a promise of the Divine cleansing and forgiveness, but an exhortation to repentance and amendment. Sinful men are to wash away their dark and ominous stains, to become as white as snow, as pure as wool. He attempts no critical defence of his translation, which indeed admits of none. All he has to say for it is, "The reading which makes the Verse express a promise of extraordinary forgiveness, as if God would count scarlet as snow, and crimson as wool, was certainly not the Prophet's meaning, though it has passed largely into the rhetoric of the pulpit."

And, no doubt, "the rhetoric of the pulpit" has much to answer for. To talk—and many good men have talked—of God as holding men to be what they are not, as if our repentance would strike the Omniscient colour-blind, as if He could be induced to impute to them a righteousness they do not possess, or fling a white robe of immaculate purity over an open and flagrant wickedness, is an offence against that very "reason" to which He here appeals. It is to represent God as unjust ; it is to impute to Him an immoral connivance with iniquity which is simply incredible to rational and thoughtful men. *They* know that God is not to be mocked thus ; that to Him scarlet is always scarlet, and

white white ; that sin is always sin, and holiness holiness. They see, they cannot but see, that God acts and reigns by law, not by caprice ; that He permits and compels every man to receive the due result or recompense of his deeds ; that when we transgress, we have to take the natural consequences of our transgressions, however deep and sincere our penitence may be : and that, if we stand before Him with a character all stained with iniquity, its crimson dye penetrating to the very texture of our life, He neither "makes believe" that we are pure from sin, nor suddenly, and as by a stroke of enchantment, relieves us from the natural consequences of our sin.

And do not *we* know it too ? Does not our own experience teach us that if we have formed and indulged any evil habit, no agony of contrition can at once release us from its grasp, or avert that punishment which is the other half of sin ? Do men believe an habitual liar, do they trust an habitual thief, the very moment he repents and confesses his sin ? Has he not to submit to distrust and suspicion long after he has left his evil ways ? Nay, does he trust himself ? Does he not feel that his sinful habit has bred in him a predisposition to evil, a weakness in the face of temptation, from which the habitually honest and veracious are exempt ? A drunkard or a profligate may repent, confess, abstain. God may have forgiven his sins. But does he therefore regain at once the health which he has impaired, or freedom from inordinate desires, or the reputation he has flung away ? If he has lost social position, or

squandered his substance in riotous living, is he forthwith reinstated in the place he has forfeited? does his wasted substance come back to him? can he recall those who by his evil example, have been led astray? Ah, no; the crimson stain long cleaves to him; men are not sure of him: he is not sure of himself. He has to reap what he has sown, and can only look for a better crop as he sows better seed. He may recover from his fall, and start afresh; but it will be long before his bruises cease to throb and ache; he may be the weaker for it as long as he lives: and if he has dragged others down with him, it may be wholly beyond his power to recover them.

To represent God, therefore, as taking scarlet for white, to say that He forgives sin the very moment that we repent, if at least we mean by that, that He arrests the retributions which wait on sin and are a part of it, is to contradict the facts of daily experience. We *cannot* believe it, though we may be wicked or heedless enough to profess that we believe it.

But does not *the Bible* teach a remission of sins which in some sense, makes them as though they had not been, which blots them out? Its gospel is hardly "glad tidings of great joy" to sinful men if it does not? For if I go to a man and say, "Sir, you are in an evil case—crimsoned with many stains, defiled with many pollutions of guilt. Rouse yourself, and mend. Wash away your stains, set out on a steadfast course of purity and goodness, and God will accept and bless you,"—that is one thing. But it is a very different thing if I can go to him and say, "You are in an evil case indeed, defiled and

weakened by many transgressions, with an evil bias in your very blood and habit. But God is your Father. He loves you despite your offences. He has given the most pathetic and overwhelming proof of his love. He will forgive you the very moment you confess your sins. He will help you to strive against and subdue the evil habits you have formed, the evil bias you have contracted, and so help you that at last you shall stand before Him every whit whole and clean." And unless we had this latter gospel, "the gospel of the grace of God," to preach, surely we might almost as well hold our tongue for any good that we could hope to do.

Yet we must not preach this gospel if it is not true, if it is in plain opposition to the facts of daily experience. But *is* it? Is there no way in which God can be at once just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly who renounce their ungodliness,—no way which harmonizes with our experience instead of contradicting it? If God be our Father, there surely must be. For, consider. Here stands a father, the father of many children. One of his sons runs wild, abandons his home and all the pure happy traditions of his home, goes from bad to worse. Does his father, if he is a good father, cease to love him? Nay, his love grows more anxious, more active, though for a time, perchance, he can only shew his love by frowning on the vices which are destroying his child, and by correcting him for yielding to them. But at last, by the corrections of want and pain, the poor foolish lad is brought to himself. As he thinks of the miserable return he has made for his father's love and goodness,

he is consumed with remorse. The memory of that tender and beneficent goodness draws him homeward. He comes and confesses his sins, prays for forgiveness and for help to do better. Now if his father should reply, "I cannot forgive you ; I can give you no help till you have proved your sincerity, till you have recovered yourself and have regained the substance you have flung away in sinful riot. Go, mend ; go, mend :"—what hope were there for the abashed penitent ? Deject and wretched, his last hope gone, the only goodness in which he could still trust having failed him, what could he do but lie down and die in his sins ? But if his father should welcome and embrace him, if his love should run out to meet and forgive the returning wanderer, if he should restore him to his former place, make much of him, and rejoice over the son who was lost but is found,—ah, then, new springs of hope and strength and courage would be unsealed within the contrite heart ; all his sorrow for his past sins would be deepened, all his resolves of future amendment invigorated and confirmed.

Now is there any injustice, any violation or disregard of law, in such forgiveness of sins as this ? It were strange if there be ; for the familiar story of love and pardon, however often or poorly it is told, touches and commends itself to every heart.

But look at it more closely, from a more unemotional and logical point of view. The father has forgiven his son ; the son is at home again, pardoned and restored. But are the natural consequences of his sins therefore averted ? If he has injured his health by vicious excess,

is he instantly made sound? If, while he was in the far country, he injured and defrauded his neighbours, so that they became broken and hopeless men, will his repentance save and restore them? Will not every sinful craving or appetite he has indulged be the stronger for that indulgence, the more eager to be gratified, the harder to resist? Will not the memory of his old sins come back upon him to pollute and trouble all the inward springs of thought and imagination and desire? The past is not blotted out because it is forgiven. He carries it with him into the future, which it *will* try to shape, which to some extent it *must* shape, making the task of amendment so hard that, but for his father's love and pity, he might well despair of amending it.

And *this* is the forgiveness of God. When we come to Him, and confess our sins with a lowly, penitent, and contrite heart, He absolves us from our sins. He says to us, "Let all that crimson past *be* past. Have done with it. Make a new beginning. I have forgiven it. I will help you to do better. Through your very penitence, and your desire to do well, I will create a clean heart and renew a right spirit within you." And to hear that *gives* us new heart. It makes us stronger to bear whatever burdens we have entailed on ourselves by our sins, and to carry on our strife with the evil inclinations which we have pampered until they assert a kind of claim on us.

What has been done for us is this. Our wills, hitherto alien and opposed to the will of God, have been brought into harmony with his will, at least at one vital point.

We think about our past as He thinks about it, *i.e.* as all stained with sin and defect ; and, for the future, we desire for ourselves what He desires for us, that we may become pure and clean. Thus the supreme object of all his dealings with us is secured ; for his aim is to make our wills one with his perfect will. Were we to die in that first moment of reconciliation, doubtless we should be saved ; for God has many schools besides this in which He can have us trained to virtue and holiness. But, as a rule, we are left in *this* school ; and now our training begins.

And a very hard training it is. These feeble fickle wills of ours have to be drawn and fixed into a stedfast and complete harmony with the will of God ; the momentary consent has to be enlarged and deepened into an enduring unity. And this can only be accomplished by a prolonged and painful discipline, by many trials of growing severity.

We are hardly forgiven before these trials begin to come upon us. Our old evil habits wake up and assert their power. Or new and heart-breaking consequences of our former sins spring up, and put us to shame. Our wills, still feeble and unversed in trial, threaten to yield, to swing back into their old posture of opposition to the will of God. Often they do yield, and we have once more to ask forgiveness, and to renew our endeavours after a loving and obedient heart. If we were not sure, through all, that our Father loves us, that He has forgiven us, that He is helping us, we could not go on with the task set before us. It would be *too* hard for

us. It is only *this* that nerves and braces us. To take *this* from us would be to plunge us into self-despair and death.

Understood in this sense, there is no injustice, no infraction of law, nothing opposed to reason and conscience, in the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. It commends itself at once to our judgment, our experience, and our heart.

But is this the doctrine of Holy Writ? We can only doubt that it is when we take isolated passages, torn from their context, and put into them a meaning which, when fairly read, they will not bear. Look, for example, at the passage before us. Here, no doubt, the promise of forgiveness sounds as if it were absolute and unconditional; though even here a thoughtful reader would perceive that at least penitence is made a condition of forgiveness. For when men see that acts which they thought white as snow, or at worst of no very sinister hue, are really as red as crimson, when they are made to feel that they are deeply dyed with evil, they would be less than men if they were not moved to shame and contrition. But even if no such inference could be drawn from the Verse itself, it surely is very childish to separate a Verse from its context, and to complain of its teaching when, if we only read it in connection with its sister verses, we may see that it teaches the very truth which it is assumed to impugn.

Look at the other verses of this brief paragraph (Verses 18-20), and you will find that Isaiah lends no countenance to the dogma of an unconditional, and



therefore an immoral, forgiveness of sins. On the contrary, he affirms that even when men *are* white as snow, when they have been cleansed by the Divine forgiveness from the stains of their old sins, they simply commence a new probation. If they now hearken and obey, they will "eat the fat of the land;" *i.e.* obedience to the Divine Will will as surely conduct them to a true prosperity as disobedience had brought them punishment and correction: while if they refuse and rebel, if they break the law, they will be "eaten by the sword," *i.e.* they will be overtaken by death, which is the wage or consequence of sin. Take only these three Verses together, then, and they affirm the supremacy of law, the inevitableness of retribution, as clearly as modern science itself.

The land of Judah had been desolated by a terrible invasion. Jerusalem stood, a besieged city, amid felled groves and wasted fields. Can any one for a moment suppose that Isaiah meant to teach that, if the Jews repented of their sins, their slain would straightway start to life, their ruins be rebuilt, their wasted fields take fertility again? Obviously all he meant was that, if they repented and made their ways and doings good, their good deeds would as surely bear fruit unto life as their evil deeds had borne unto death; that they would begin a happier as they began a better life: while, to incite them to penitence and amendment, he assured them that God would forget their sins as fast as they remembered them, forgive their trespasses as fast as they renounced them, and help them to do good as soon and as often as they tried to do good.

Look, again, at the Verses which precede this paragraph (Vers. 3-17). Isaiah had drawn a terrible picture of the evils which the Jews had provoked by their iniquities. The whole body politic, stained with the deepest dyes of sin, was also torn and discoloured with stripes and bruises. Rather than leave their guilt uncorrected, or load them with that last worst curse—impunity, God had smitten till He was weary of smiting them. There was but one hope for them. They must submit to the Divine correction. They must cease to do evil, and learn to do well. They must set themselves to execute justice, redress wrongs, relieve the helpless and destitute and oppressed. Is *that* the language of one who cared little for law and morality? It is, rather, the language of one who held obedience to be the only freedom, and morality the only road to peace.

Look, finally, at the Verses which follow this paragraph (Vers. 21-31), and especially at the closing verses (29-31) of the Chapter. In the whole range of Sacred Literature there is no passage in which the reign of law, the inevitable certainty of retribution, is more impressively set forth. In the most graphic and biting language at his command, the Prophet asserts that the ill deeds of men carry in themselves inevitable consequences, consequences from which there is no loophole of escape. The sinner, he says, by virtue of his sins is as an oak that withers, and as a garden that hath no water. He is as tow, and his sin as the spark which sets the tow blazing. The more deeply the sin has entered into his

nature, the more searching and destructive will be the fire. It is to save them from this consuming fire that God urges them to repent and amend, that He visits their iniquities with stripes. Because He loves them, He seeks to redeem them through judgment, to save them through righteousness, *i.e.* to make them righteous in order to their salvation. And in what more forcible and telling way could the supremacy of law, the necessary and inevitable connection between our deeds and their results, be urged upon us ?

In short, it is impossible to read the Chapter *through* without discovering that Isaiah was the last man in the world to preach repentance without fruits meet for repentance, faith without works, or justification before God without a radical change of heart, a real amendment of life. And yet I am bold to say that, unless this eighteenth Verse stood where it does, unless all his insistence on law and morality had been qualified with this promise of Forgiveness, it would have been without use, without effect. For to bid sinful men obey the law of God is to mock them unless we can add, "And God will forgive your sins so soon as you repent, and help you to obey so often as you try." *How* can sinful and imperfect men obey a perfect law ? how can they climb this steep difficult path under a burden of unforgiven guilt, and without a Divine guidance and aid ? That which daunts and enfeebles the penitent, when once his sins redden like crimson under his eyes, is the fear that God can never pardon them. Replace this fear with hope, with the assurance that, as his sins grow red to

him, they will grow white to God, and you give him strength to bear his grief and to attempt amendment.

To give him this hope is *not* to make light of the law which he has broken, nor to deny that his transgressions, long after they have been forgiven, will continue to bear their natural fruit. For, as we have seen, the father who forgives his erring child, does not make light either of law or of sin; nor does he forget that his son has been a sinner, but remembers it that he may the better guard him against temptation. And the son does not forget his offences, though he knows them to be forgiven; nor does he escape their painful results: his old habits give new force to every temptation he encounters, and the seeds of evil which he may have sown in other hearts bear a harvest as bitter as if he had never known compunction. He sees and feels all this every day he lives, and can only bear a burden so heavy as he remembers his father's love and kindness, and trusts in his father's help.

Again I say it is thus with us and God. When we repent *our* Father does not forget our sins, although He forgives them. He remembers them, though He does not remember them *against* us, but that He may guard us from temptations we are not able to meet. And yet He does forget them, in the sense that He never casts our iniquities in our teeth, or suffers them to intercept his grace. He does not break the links of sequence which bind evil to evil, suffering to sin. Despite his forgiving love, we have to bear the pain of knowing that much of our life has been wasted, that we are not

so strong for service as we might have been, and of seeing others still suffer for and by sins of which we are now ashamed. And this change in our spiritual relations and attitude must be set forth in some language which men can grasp and understand. In the Bible it is set forth under such metaphors as these. God keeps a book in which our sins are entered; when we repent, and He forgives, they are blotted from his book. Or our transgressions are like scarlet and crimson dyes; but when we repent, and He forgives, scarlet and crimson fade to the whiteness of wool and snow.

No doubt the language is imperfect, as all human language must be, and may be so read as to induce a false conception of the spiritual verities it is intended to set forth. But there is no need to misunderstand it; there is little excuse for misreading it. So far from teaching us that we may violate the statutes of life with impunity, it tells us of a Grace that will both punish and forgive our transgressions, and help us to obey the laws we have broken. And this is precisely what we need. For if we know that our Father has pardoned us, we can endure whatever punishment or suffering may still flow from the sins we have confessed and renounced. And if we know that He will help us, we can address ourselves to the task of obedience in the good and sure hope, that, by his loving and unfailing help, we may at last walk in his ways and keep his commandments.

### XXXI.

#### *THE SPECIAL MEANING OF COMMON THINGS.*

“And let it be that, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself.”—  
2 SAMUEL v. 24.

AFTER the long and hazardous vicissitude of his conflict with Saul, David, who had long since been chosen by God, was at last chosen by the tribes of Israel to be their king. To forestall local jealousies and strifes, he determined to select a new capital. He fixed on Jebus, afterward called Jerusalem, which was still held by the Jébusites, a Philistine clan. This wellnigh impregnable hill-fortress fell before his military science and the valour of his troops. Once taken, David “dwelt in the fort,” built a city round it, and called it “the city of David.” “And David went on, and grew great; and the Lord of hosts was with him.”

Incensed and alarmed by his growing power, the Philistines came up to “seek” him, and spread themselves over the adjacent valley of Rephaim. David enquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up against them?”

Wilt thou deliver them into my hand?" And the Lord, answering by the oracular gems of the High Priest's breastplate, replies: "Go up; for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into thine hand." The promise is fulfilled; the Lord breaks out upon them like a torrent; so that ever afterward the spot is called "The place of the breaking-forth."

Again, however, the Philistines "came up and spread themselves," set themselves in array, in the valley of Rephaim. Again David enquires of the Lord. And now he receives a new command, a new figure is introduced. Instead of advancing against the front of the enemy, he is to "fetch a compass" and to come upon them from behind the grove of mulberry, or *baca*, *i.e.* balsam, trees in which they have encamped. Instead of seeing the river of the Divine indignation surging over its bounds to swallow them up quick, he is to listen for "the sound of a going," or, as the Hebrew word implies, "the sound of a *marching*," in the tops of the trees, the rush and advance of an invisible army. This promise also is fulfilled; this portent sent. The trees sway and rustle as beneath a mighty wind; and in this common sound, the rustling or *susurrus* of the trees, David hears the tramp of the invisible hosts of the Lord of hosts. He and his troops accept the signal; they arise and smite the flying foe "from Geba even unto Gezer," driving the Philistines, *i.e.*, beyond the southern border of the kingdom.

This, in brief, is the story which illustrates my text. And in the text, thus lit up, we may find a lesson, a

homily on the special meaning and value of common things. For the sound as of a going in the tops of the trees was no unusual sound to David ; nor is it an unusual sound to us. It is one of the commonest of sounds. Day by day the trees bend and sway and rustle as beneath the flying steps of an invisible host ; they toss their arms as if wrestling with some unseen Presence and Power. And yet, common and familiar as the sound is, what portents and prophecies may be latent in it, if only we could read it aright ! To the Philistines, had they had ears to hear, that sound of a marching in the tops of the balsams was the omen, the presage, of their approaching doom ; or it was as the sigh of an Infinite Pity over the doom which their sins had provoked. To David and his men, the very same sound was the signal for battle, the promise of victory : it announced the presence of an unseen ally and foretold their coming triumph. As we, who know the whole story, stand in thought beneath the swaying rustling boughs, with what awe, what pity, what exultation, what an overpowering sense of the Divine Presence, does the sound fill our hearts ! Common as it is, it speaks to us with the most special and piercing significance. As we listen, we hear in it the sound of mighty wings—the wings of that great invisible host which always fights on behalf of justice and truth ; the whispering leaves are the very oracles of fate, and we hear in them the groans of the dying Philistines and the joyful shouts of the victorious Hebrews. The trees shake from their branches a throng of portents and auguries, of human



hopes and fears, thick as the falling leaves of autumn, any one of which might suffice to rouse our whole power of thought and unseal the deepest springs of emotion.

And the common sights and sounds of life still have a special message for us if only we have ears to hear and hearts to understand ; a message on our recognition of which our progress in wisdom and virtue largely depends. What a different *world*, for instance, this familiar world would be, did we but recognize the presence and activity of God in the ordinary phenomena of nature and the daily occurrences of life, if we believed that He still rode on the wings of the wind, and that we might hear the sound of his going ! We do believe that He was in the world *once*, nay, *twice*. We believe that He was here during the long creation days, causing the earth to bring forth grass and herb, and the air to bring forth fowl of every kind, and the waters to swarm with fish. We believe, too, that, in the fulness of times, at the ripe moment, God was manifest in the flesh and dwelt among us, reading and interpreting the lessons of the lilies and the ravens, with all other of the creatures He had made ; reading and interpreting no less the lines which Life had written on human faces, and Time had graven on all the callings and occupations of men—finding, *i.e.*, and teaching us to find, a deep significance in every common sight and sound. But we do not much expect to find God in the world now. It is ages since He made it. Nineteen centuries have elapsed since He last visited it ; and it may be as many more before He will visit it again. We no longer hear a sound of his going.

And as in the world, so also in the *Church*. If we do not say, we often feel as if God were no longer with us. He *was* in the Church once, long ago. There was a sound of his going at Pentecost. The inspiration of the Apostles, the tongues with which they spake who believed, and their gift of healing, proved that He was with the faithful then. But we have no such proofs of his presence now. And so many of us, instead of acting in the living present, are always waiting and longing for signs and wonders, for days of special grace, for outpourings and baptisms of the Spirit. We cannot find God in the ordinary, only in the extraordinary ; we look for Him, not in law, but in miracle. We do not recognize his Presence, and avail ourselves of it in the common things of the Church, in its regular ministries and customary ordinances. Of these we often grow weary, because they do not bring God home to our thoughts and our affections. Day by day, week by week, the trees of the field and the wood sway and rustle ; but we hear no sound of a Divine "going," see no signs of a Divine presence ; or we hear but faintly and see but in part : and thus we miss the double blessing of insight into God's ways and of working together with Him. Hence many among us are for ever running after special men, special services, special means of grace, if perchance they may thus catch some glimpse of God and feel some touch of his power on their hearts.

It behoves us, therefore, to remember that even the commonest things, the most ordinary events, the most regular and familiar ministries, bring us a message from

Heaven. God has *not* left either the Church or the world. We need not climb the heights to bring Him down, nor cross the sea to bring Him back. He is still very nigh to every one of us, and we may hear his Voice in every good word to which we listen. His special and miraculous manifestations of Himself in the creation and redemption of the world were designed to reveal his *perpetual* presence and activity. He who was once *seen* making herb and grass and flower, bird and beast, still makes them, although we see Him not, clothing them with new beauty every year, opening his hand to supply their needs, and reading us lessons of trust and hope through them and his care of them. He who was once *seen* in the Church, giving men tongues of fire and power to heal, is still in the Church, although we see Him not, speaking to us through every word of truth, healing us through every sanitary and medicinal ordinance of his House. True, we have no sacred Urim whose gems kindle with mystic intimations of the Divine Will, no infallible Oracle to interpret us to ourselves, to solve our doubts, to allay our fears. But

What though no answering Voice be heard?  
God's oracles, the written Word,  
Counsel and guidance still impart,  
Responsive to the seeking heart.

And this divine oracular Word is interpreted to us, and impressed upon us, by all the changeful yet common experiences of our life. Let faith be but active, and there is no lack of visions and voices from Heaven.

All things are God's ministers, all speak to us of Him, whether they be things of the world or of the Church.

How often, for instance, when we are in a mood at once receptive and devout, do we hear in the voices of Nature the voice of God ! We are disquieted perhaps, and perplexed. The cares of life have taken hold upon us, or its toils have exhausted us, or its losses and disappointments have grieved and fretted us. And as we walk through valleys covered over with corn, or gaze on the wayside flower unfolding its beauty to the sun, springing from the dust and yet as fresh and pure as if it had its roots in heaven ; or as we study the marvellous and delicate structure of leaf or insect ; or as we stroll through solemn groves of fir or through woods whose dimmest recesses are lovely with the coloured light reflected from its half-hidden grasses and ferns ; or even as we pause amid the dust and turmoil of crowded streets and look up to the fair blue sky flecked with white clouds,—something of the calm and peace of nature steals into our unquiet hearts, hushing their turbulence, winning us at least to a moment's rest.

Or, again, we are oppressed with the burden of thought. There is so much guilt and misery within and around us, and we are so conscious of it, that for a time we cannot see "the final goal of good to which all things round." The whole world seems disordered and out of course, and we with it, and there is none to set it right. We beat and weary our brains upon the insoluble problems which have baffled and saddened humanity since men began to think. And then some opportunity

of helping a forlorn and outcast brother comes in our way. We aid him as best we can, and, in helping him, help ourselves still more. The weary weight of all this unintelligible world slips from our hearts we know not how ; in actively serving our neighbour we are saved from vain speculations about his fate and ours.

Or, once more ; we are worn down or worn out with the stress of toil and duty. Our heart has lost its proper freshness and vigour. The monotonous round of daily tasks, and still more perhaps a brooding sense of our ineffective discharge of them, has dulled our spiritual edge and force. Life hardly seems worth living—there is so little change and movement in it, so little brightness and joy. And then the day of the Lord dawns on us. We go up to the House of worship. Our hearts grow lighter as we join in the common supplication, as we confess our faults, as we review our mercies, our convictions, our hopes. Some word from the Book, or of comment on the Book, comes home to us ; it seems made for us and sent to us ; it speaks comfortably to us ; a sense of the Divine Pity and Love grows upon us ; and we go on our way with new heart, take up our old burdens in a new spirit, content to do what God would have us do, and to bear what He would have us bear.

These are quite common experiences ; in many such ways as these we have all been helped and comforted. But, in these common experiences, is not God shewing Himself to be with us, and opening our ears to his Voice ? Is He not as really and effectually with us,

in thus giving a special meaning and a special power to common sights and sounds, is He not as really and effectually speaking to us, as though we could hear audible voices from an oracular Shrine, or see jewels blazing and clouding on the breast of a High Priest?

Yet we have all had such experiences as these, though possibly we took little note of them at the time, and did not value them as we should. But as we recall the past we *can* see how, again and again, God has taught and helped and cheered us by these common ministries of his Providence and Grace. We can see *now*; might we not have seen *then*, when we were under this gracious discipline? Shall we not set our heart henceforth to see what He is doing with us and for us; how He is helping and saving us by the little checks and restraints of every passing hour, by the incitements and encouragements which He bestows upon us through the ordinary and accustomed ministry whether of Nature or of the Church?

But how, it may be asked—*how* are we to learn the special meaning and value of common things? How are we to know when God is speaking with us, and what He would have us do? To this question the story of my text suggests a sufficient reply. How did David know that the sound of a going on the tops of the trees had a special meaning for him, and what that meaning was? He knew *because he had enquired of the Lord*, because, *i.e.*, he had honestly tried to find out what God's will was, and actively bestirred himself to do it. And on precisely the same terms *we* may enjoy a Divine

guidance and help. For it is when we really want to know what God's will is, *and mean to do it*; it is when we honestly commit our way unto the Lord and ask Him to direct our steps; it is when we are looking for an answer to our request, and are resolved to act on it even though it should cross our wishes and plans: it is when, like David, this appeal for a Divine guidance, this reference to a Divine standard, has grown habitual to us, so that we make it at every turn and every step,—it is then that the common things of life are charged with a special meaning and a special discipline for us, and we walk at large because we recognize and keep the commandments of God.

Finally, let us mark that it is this recognition of the special and divine meaning of common things, or the non-recognition of it, which makes all the difference between different men. That sound as of a swift stately march on the tops of the trees produced, no doubt, a very different effect on David, and on his men, though it had the same meaning for both. To both him and them it was a signal for battle, an omen of victory. But to the men it was probably a mere rustling, only trees shaken by the wind; while to the royal Poet, to the man whose heart had been made sensitive by thought, emotion, and prayer, it was the rhythmic march and rush of an invisible angelic host. That sound had a very different effect on David and on the Philistines, though *for them* it had even a more solemn and thrilling message than for him. God's host descends and advances for their destruction; but, spread at their ease

and regardless of Heaven, they hear no note of alarm in the stormy menace of the wind-tossed branches. It is only the *prepared* heart, the heart prepared by fellowship with God, which detects the special and divine meaning of the phenomena of nature, the facts of history, and the ordinary occurrences of life. The very Cross itself is merely an historical relic, or a badge of superstition, to some men ; while to others it is the supreme symbol of Love and Redemption. To some the Inspired Word is only a letter that kills ; while to others it is a quickening spirit. To some the ordinances and sacraments of the Church are only outward forms of doubtful obligation ; while to others they are in very deed " means of grace." All depends on what men are, on what they bring with them : for, as Wordsworth has it,

Minds that have nothing to confer  
Find little to perceive.

In Cross and Word and Sacraments, the common things of the Church, as in the common facts of Nature and Life, they can only see what they bring the power of seeing. How, indeed, *should* those who have no faith in Him see the invisible God anywhere, or in anything ? They lack the very faculty, the very organ, that eye of the soul by which He is discerned. Only those who love Him, and who seek his face continually, can rise to the height of a constant communion with Him, and trace his goings in every sight that greets their eye, hear his voice in every sound that falls upon their ear, feel



his hand in every event which moulds their life ; and thus bring,

a something of celestial light  
Round the familiar face of every day.

How stands it, then, with you, my brethren ? Have you this "vision and faculty divine" ? Is your God a dead or a living God ? an absent or a present God ? Have you found Him in his Word, and therefore in the whole realm of Nature ? in his Son, and therefore in his Word ? You may have conceived Him imperfectly : you may have served Him imperfectly. But if you have learned to look for Him, and are bent on serving Him, He will reveal Himself ever more perfectly to you, and draw you into a closer correspondence with his will. It is not an accurate creed which He demands of you first of all, nor a life without blemish or spot ; but the trust and affection which every good father requires and deserves of his children. Give him these ; look and listen for the sound of his going, bestir yourselves, when you hear that sound, to follow and obey, and all will be well with you, and ever better, until at last you become perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

When Saul of Tarsus, with certain Jews, was on his way to Damascus, and a great light from heaven shone round about them, and a mysterious sound fell through the air, it was only Saul who saw the glorified Son of Man in the light, and heard the voice of his appealing tenderness in the sound. Those who travelled with him heard a sound indeed, but no words ; they saw a light,

but no "Lord" in the light. And why? Had Saul, while exceeding mad against the name of Christ, a prepared and spiritual heart? Yes, for even then he verily thought to do God service; and therefore he was prepared to receive new revelations of the Divine truth and love. And here lies your hope and mine. In much we may still be wrong, still imperfect. But if our hearts be right with God, if we are bent on serving Him, He will shine into our hearts from the face of Jesus Christ, to enlighten our darkness, to correct our mistakes, and to make all things ours by teaching us to see Him in them all.

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Baldwin	16
United States Notes	23

Basque Legends	4
Bible and the Age	7
Dawn of the XIXth Century	10
Legendary Hist. of Cross	3

Labour, Land and Law	9
True Story of the French Dispute in Madagascar	25

About the Theatre	21
Euphorion	11, 16
Expositions	17
History of Netherlands	25
How to be Happy though Married	10
Literary Landmarks	21
Lives of Robert and Mary Moffat	10
Manners Makyth Man	6
Ole Bull	17

On Tuscan Hills	17
Parousia, The	7
Robinson Crusoe	19
Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy	11, 16
Studies in Greek Art	25
Summer	16

Amazon, The	14
Arminius Vambéry	24
Bird's Nest, The	7
Comtist Lover, A	6
Gladys Fane	14
Last Stake, The	14
Lazy Minstrel, The	6
Letters from Italy	25
Life and Work in Benares	20
Light in Lands of Darkness	20
Major Frank	14
Making of the Irish Nation	9
Manners Makyth Man	6
Melita	14
Merciful or Merciless	14
My Study	19
Paying the Pastor	19
Poets in the Garden	11
Poison Tree	14
Tales in the Speech House	15
Tarantella	14
Queen of the Arena	15
Unknown God	18

Arminius Vambéry	24
Belcaro	11, 16
Boys' Own Stories	5
Charles Whitehead	21
Henry Irving	13
Heroic Tales	11
In the Time of Roses	5
Medical Missions	20
Modern Missions	20
Old Year Leaves	22
Pilgrim Sorrow	17
Prince Peerless	5
Seven Ages of Man	13
Story of the Nations	8
Temple, The	19
Three Reforms of Parliamt.	23
Wreckers of Lavernock	26

Asserted but not Proved	15
Beckside Boggle, The	15
Echelus	16
Francis	15
Last Meeting	23
Layman's Study of Bible	18
Lost Son, A	15

Reality of Faith	18
Reality of Religion	18
Roman Students	26

Measured Steps	22
----------------	----

An Italian Garden	22
Charles Dickens as I Knew Him	10
Christ of History	19
Dick's Holidays	30
Fairy Tales from Brentano	12
Footprints	28
Gudrun	28
Hope's Gospel	22
House by the Works	26
How to be Happy though Married	10
Industrial Curiosities	28
I've been Gypsying	19
"Lives Worth Living" Series	27
Minor Poet, A	22
Orpheus	22
Ottile	16
Prince of the 100 Soups	16
Plant Life	27
Settling Day	26
Shelley Birthday Book	20
Time and Times	22
Treasure Book	20
Verses of Varied Life	22
When I was a Child	12

American Dishes	28
Army Examination Series	20
Beauties and Frights	26
Illustrated Poetry Book	28
Margaret the Moonbeam	26
Off Duty	26
Saint Hildred	6
Southwood	12
Tales of the Caliph	5
Way to Fortune	27

Diary of Golden Thoughts	12
Dr. Johnson	21
Dr. Martin Luther	21
John Widif.	21

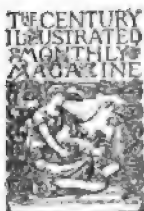
Dottings of a Dossier	9
Half-Holiday Handbooks	30
London and Elsewhere	17
Stops	29

Half-Holiday Handbooks	30
------------------------	----

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